

School Facilities Study: Final Report to the Board of Education  
April 7, 2016

***Unatego Central School District***



Castallo and Silky-*Education Consultants*  
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# Advisory Committee

- Terry Brown
- Ron Decker
- Kim Gascon
- Lew Keyser
- Katherine Mazourek
- Melaine Ruff
- Jeanne Butler
- Ed Frazier
- Patti Hoyt
- Ernie Kroll
- Kelly Poje
- Fran Secor
- Heather Coleman
- Scott Garno
- Katie James
- Elaine Lowe
- Tyler Post
- Kim Trask



# Other Thank You's!!!!

- Superintendent Dave Richards and Colleen Cioccari
- District administrators and support staff
- The Board of Education



# Study Questions

- *Is there a better way....educationally and fiscally....to reconfigure the grades to provide a sound instructional program now and in the future?*
- *If so, how should the grades and facilities be arranged?*



# Key Findings



1. District enrollments have been declining and are projected to continue to decline. This is consistent with other demographic indicators regarding the area in general. (12)
2. Considering all schools in the district and in light of declining enrollments, there is excess capacity for housing more students than is currently being used. This excess capacity is primarily at the Unadilla Elementary School, the Middle School, and the High School. (23-26)
3. The current district grade level pattern (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12) is one of the most common found in schools today for the middle grades. However researchers agree there is no “one best way” to organize the grades that improves student learning. (37-38)

# Key Findings

4. The district's current transportation plan to get students to and from school uses a shuttle system and, as a result, there is considerable loss of instructional time due to this shuttle system. (33-34)
5. Although the community consistently supports the school budget put forward by the Board of Education, the district is in very poor financial condition. (34-36)
6. The most recent (2015) Building Conditions Survey indicates it would take \$3,721,000 at Unadilla Elementary School, \$4,200,000 at Otego Elementary, \$8,010,000 at the Middle/High School, and \$317,000 at the bus garage to implement all the recommended changes. (27-31)

**KEY FINDINGS**

# Key Findings



7. The architects estimate it would cost approximately \$18-20,000,000 if the district chose to build a new elementary school and house all the grade K-5 students in this new building. (54)
8. The closing of any school in the district may or may not impact housing values in the area. Research is inconsistent on this topic and from at least two cases examined it does not seem to have adversely impacted local assessed or full property values. (43-46)
9. If the district chooses to close any school it is highly unlikely it would be able to sell the building at a price any where near the appraised value of the school. (46-47)

# Key Findings

10. Although the district has made a number of recent staff cuts, if the district did close one of its elementary schools, this would create more staffing efficiencies and save the district approximately \$392,000 recurring each year. (32-33)
11. Closing one elementary school would also result in approximately \$35-40,000 in annual utility savings. (42)
12. The district's outstanding debt service will be paid off after 2025. Over the repayment period remaining, the district could use some of the reduced principal and interest amounts each year to add to a capital fund or pay off any new debt. (59)





# Key Findings

13. To implement either option 2 or 3 that the committee has discussed would result in negligible impact on transportation cost. However the district would need to find additional drivers. (47 and 56)
14. There would be a tax benefit for all residents if Otego Elementary School were closed and all K-4 elementary students attend the Unadilla school with the 5<sup>th</sup> graders moving to the middle school. (48-51)
15. If the district chooses to close both elementary schools and build a new elementary school, there would be increased capital debt and some *possible* tax increase starting in 2020. (57)



# Conclusion

**Study Purpose:** Is there a better way...educationally and fiscally...to use the existing schools and to provide a sound instructional program now and in the future? If so, how should the facilities best be used?

**Conclusion:** The consultants have concluded that there is a better way educationally and fiscally to reconfigure the grades to provide a sound instructional program. While several “feasible” options were explored in depth, only one provides maximum fiscal benefits while at the same time enhancing the educational environment for local area students.



# Timeline for Construction of a New Elementary School

**Table 9.18  
Tentative Timeline for Construction of New Elementary School**

Activity	No. of Months	Date
Board makes decision to proceed with the construction of a new elementary school	2-3	June 2016
Board establishes facilities committee to guide planning	2	September 2016
Evaluation of existing site (Addition vs. separate building; impacts on cost; analysis of maximum cost allowance)	2-3	December 2016
Establish building design (Elementary space; secondary space; potential shared space)	1-2	February 2017
Preliminary submission to SED (Confirmation of building aid; enrollment projections; district plan)	3-4	June 2017
Approval by Board of Education	1	July 2017
Communication/input from community	4-5	December 2017
Financial analysis (Capital reserve; debt coming off; maximum cost allowance; fiscal advisor's involvement)	1	January 2018
Set referendum (Referendum language from bond counsel; SEQR; environmental assessment)	3	April 2018
Referendum vote	1	May 2018
Design of school (Schematic drawings; design drawings; construction drawings; hire construction manager)	7-9	February 2019
SED review (Full architectural/engineering review required)	5-8	October 2019
Bidding/awarding of bids	2	December 2019
Construction	18-24	December 2021

# Recommendations



- 1. It is recommended that, effective with the 2017-18 school year:
  - a. The Otego Elementary School should be closed;
  - b. Grades K-2 should be moved from the Otego Elementary School to the Unadilla Elementary School;
- 2. It is further recommended that, upon closing the Otego Elementary School, the school district should implement the staffing savings identified in this study using attrition.
- 3. It is further recommended that the district secure voter approval to establish a capital reserve account at its earliest convenience.

# Recommendations



- 4. It is further recommended that the district fund its capital reserve account with the monies that are saved from the staffing reductions in #2 above, with any reductions in the district's debt service (\$75,976 in 2016-17, \$414 in 2017-18, and \$49,674 in 2018-19), and any other surplus funds that are generated at the end of the fiscal year.
- 5. It is further recommended that the district convene a facilities planning committee whose role it will be to develop a long term facilities plan for the district including the design of a new elementary school to be located on the middle/high school campus.

# Recommendations



- 6. It is further recommended that the Unadilla Elementary School be closed in the same year that the new elementary school is ready for use.
- 7. It is further recommended that the district should immediately explore the possible sale and/or leasing of the Otego Elementary School and for the Unadilla Elementary School at a time that the elementary school is ready for use.
- 8. It is further recommended that the 5<sup>th</sup> grade remain in the Unadilla Elementary School. Given that the number of elementary grade sections may change in the future, should the district receive funding and be in a position of establishing a Pre-K program, decisions about the location of the Pre-K program and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade should be made at that time.

# Questions????

