

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
106 Hancock Rd.
Peterborough, New Hampshire

CONTOOCOOK VALLEY SCHOOL BOARD

Fracestown Elementary School

325 2nd NH Turnpike South

Thursday, December 19, 2019

Community Forum

6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Dr. Kimberly Saunders opened the forum at 6:00 p.m.

Stephan Morrissey read an introduction to the meeting outlining the reasons for the forum.

Norms-Ground Rules were reviewed.

Joe Miller, facilitator for this meeting shared areas of information that will be gathered tonight.

Three parts for the conversation; strengths, what information do you need, what are your worries or concerns?

What do you think the strengths are of Fracestown Elementary School? Share a story that shows that strength in action. How might we build on this success?

- Broad community support i.e. PTO, community member volunteers, meeting support (Stephanie Lee, Fracestown)
- The heartbeat of the community
- Teachers are unique in how they teach in their approach.
- Serena Arnold, Fracestown, prefers the experience their children achieve in a smaller community school, it is the reason they relocated here
- Steve Chamberlin, Fracestown, dedication of the staff. Multi-age classroom organization is the example. It is a model for the district.
- Nicole, Fracestown, people would not want to move to town if there were not a school in town.
- Realtor, hears concern that middle and high school go out of town to get to school but are pleased that there is an elementary.
- Commute is short for elementary; lost revenues.
- Stephanie Lee, School is a resource for homeschool students in town.
- Not just a school, it is a community together and kids can have a good time (Henry Chamberlin, student) community fairs bring people together.
- Clara Chamberlin, student, teachers supporting students.
- Henry Chamberlin – FES brought him closer to his friends; positives for learning.
- Nicole – students get more attention in small schools rather than being pushed through. Teachers are allowed to focus on students to make them stronger.
- Neighborhood for a very rural community
- John Sosito, Fracestown, selling point for purchasing a home is lower student to teacher ratio
- Abigail Wilde, sense of community that this school creates. Provides an identity for Fracestown students.
- B. Howell, Fracestown, community support i.e. town working with students ex. Recycling.
- David, Fracestown, multi-age pilot that is taking place at FES. It works well for his children.
- Jim Bosman, Fracestown, met with three juniors at CVHS, never met more confident, compassionate students. These qualities are developed from the beginning and not just at high school. It creates a valuable citizen as the end product.
- Steve Chamberlin, parental involvement is important, having the school in close proximity is important. Would never had the opportunities to volunteer with teaching kids coding or how to use a telescope otherwise.
- Realtor reported having had a family put an offer in on a home today in part because of the close proximity of the school. Students have been doing Outside Lions Learning. Kids love the outdoor program. This ties in to teacher dedication.

- Francestown has always educated their own. They are not prepared to think of Francestown without a school. Deep history of having a school in town.

Board wants feedback and input. Board wants to be transparent about what is going on in the district. People have been asking for information. What information do you feel is missing that would be helpful to you?

- Where does the data come when discussing “When is a small school too small?” Are there studies that suggest (scientific, evidence based studies) that address this? Is it a grab for larger schools to scoop up the smaller? Otherwise, it is coming out of left field. What is the threshold?
- What are the facts on the rumor – parents that are choosing to send their kids to attend another alternative choice or homeschool; why?
- How did we get from consolidation discussion to closing just Francestown? What is the rationale?
- What is the impact of closing a school?
- Henry Chamberlin – Why is this happening? Is it about money? Money is not everything or the best choice. Is this financially driven?
- Steve Chamberlin would like information around school census and demographics that drive the decision for this process. From the trending perspective, from 2010 to today, FES is the only one that enrollment has gone up. He spoke about birth rates bottoming out this year and then trending up.
- How are trends being estimated?
- Jim Bosman – heard that students would be reassigned to another school until at which time the population grew and enrollment went up. He wants the board to be honest about the reality of reopening a school that is closed.
- Kevin Pobst – on the concept of too small- would like information on this district in particular that shows that students coming from smaller schools that reflect students performing less well than those from the larger elementary schools. He has also heard that there are social/emotional disadvantages for students in smaller schools? Having data would be helpful.
- What would be the anticipated savings and where would those chunks of money be saved?
- Heather Whipple-Simard – who is responsible for the building if it is closed? What is the cost?
- If there was a cost savings what would the schools do with that money to make up for a superior education?
- Brad Howell – letter went out to families; assertion was that each school should be at least staffed by 7 people. Of the seven, are they required or recommended or a best practice? What is the basis of the recommendation?
- How do we get out of the cross hairs of this focus?
- What is the plan for the staff and teachers who work at FES?
- There has been an assertion that because of the size ...what policies exist.
- This is an isolated teaching environment; what latitude exists.
- Is the threshold a policy? If this happens to other schools does it trigger this as well?
- “No decision has been made yet has been stated”; an administration recommendation has been made. Having a hard time reconciling these statements.
- Stephan Morrissey – when a recommendation comes in, it is discussed at the board. It is not something that can take place in a hurry. The board needs to hear concerns of the community. How will challenges be made in the future? There will be more meetings. This type of forum will also take place in other towns.
- With the voluntary transfer, why wouldn't students choose to come to FES; FES could be a magnet school.
- Need a list of what the challenges are.

Worries:

- What happens to teachers and staff?
- What happens to the building?
- Clara Chamberlin – if kids go to another school the school they go to might need more money.
- If FES closes, would local families actually stay in the district or find another way to educate?
- Splitting the FES population up impacts the middle school enrollment or do FES students have a choice for middle school?
- How long do we have to worry about this?
- With FES being the most east, why FES?
- Kids would lose their neighborhood, their identity as Francestown kids.
- ConVal is a unity of nine towns, concern is that talking about one particular elementary school is a tactic that would have a splintering effect on the district. There is not a will to close the small schools; therefore we hope one will sacrifice one of their own.
- Worried that the decision will be made on other reasons than what is best for students educationally, socially, and emotionally.
- If we don't have a school, we won't have people coming to town. It has a broader impact in other areas in the town.
- Loss of connection with other groups; library etc.
- Worries that it would be difficult to reverse should this occur.
- Where would the kids go to school?
- Property values; what is the impact? Loans could get upside down.

Joe Miller thanked everyone for coming out tonight. There is an idea that there will be additional community meetings. By the end of January there will be a more formal timeline of events.

Notes will be posted. Steve Chamberlin will post information; contact him.

Why go to other towns for this type of forum if it is proposed for Francestown? Stephan Morrissey said that the problems need to be discussed. Information will be gathered from other towns. Ideas from people are important. All school board meetings and subcommittee meetings are open to the public. The ConVal community has always supported education. We are a diverse board. We put kids first. The board wants people to be involved.

Stephan Morrissey said that he looks forward to finding solutions to the problems and to meet the needs of the kids.

The Public Forum was called to a close at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Marschok