

**Board of Education Meeting  
Monday, October 16, 2006 (7:30 pm)**

**DR. ROBERT CRONIN:**

- No clear advantage for suggested configuration.

**Benefits:**

- Smaller age span – stronger teacher involvement (literacy and numeracy)
- Administrators can work more closely with other teachers and parents
- Better balance of class size
- Curriculum and field trips – more consistent
- More unified in philosophy
- Operational costs can be reduced (example: don't need double set of materials – library, more targeted use of support staff)

**How transition will be handled**

- site visits; principal visits; pen pals with 4<sup>th</sup> graders

**Transportation**

- no bus route will be longer than 45 minutes (which was referred to as being similar to current bus length limit). Spoke to the bus company representative on Friday and she thinks it is doable.

**Board then allowed for public comment. This went on until 10:00 pm.**

**Some comments and questions from the public follow (NOTE: may not include all parent comments where redundancy occurred and will note as a number for each for reference purposes in case comments later to be provided. Included comments from 36 parents and then two noted as having spoken a second time. Also referred to speakers as Woodbury or Bethlehem parent – not to show a divide between the two towns as being different, but sometimes location of town may matter in this meeting's topic).**

**Blue highlights:** note new speaker

**Green highlights:** tried to note those parents with questions on the topic. Tried not to duplicate in text if another parent asked the same type of question.

**Red highlights:** added personal comment to what I think may have been meant.

**1. WOODBURY PARENT:**

- Request for a detailed timeline.
- Seems that this is all a foregone conclusion and may be voted on tonight

- Portables have issues (such as mold) and the idea is to get rid of portables. How can we add more students to a school and remove the portable idea?
- Transportation – what is cost estimate? (answered later by BOE - \$40 – 50k estimate)
- Recommended class sizes – how will this change?
- Not much information has been disseminated to the public for such a big suggested change.

## 2. WOODBURY PARENT:

- Will be losing the long term relationship school – children will not be going to school together (sibling issue being discussed here)
- Maxing parents out – multiple schools. Children already stressed with a lot of activities now and will be adding an extra 20 minutes in drive time.
- Was the idea of drawing out the Woodbury line further and sending more Woodbury children living closer to Bethlehem to BES – which would preserve the K-5 idea?
- Many regions with K-5 configuration meet in Middle School and it works – why not for us?
- Votes fail because of lack of written information. Reconsider the K-5 school and fix Mitchell. NOTE: this is being referred to because we now have a Superintendent that the BOE commented will provide a lot of written communication).

## 3. WOODBURY PARENT:

- Studies show 30 minutes a long enough bus ride.
- Reconfiguration Search – '99 transition years, drop in achievement.
- Siblings: bought their home in this district because K-8 across the street.

## 4. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- Busing issue will not be cost effective option. They are currently the second stop now and children on the bus for 20 minutes – no way to get to 45 minutes when we don't have that now.
- Balance the problem by extending the area (NOTE: another reference to bringing more Woodbury children into BES that live closer to BES)

## 5. WOODBURY PARENT (ALSO AN EDUCATION CONSULTANT):

- Important for child to be in a place where they feel connected.
- Multi-year struggle at this region for an answer.
- Supports configuration change.
- 5<sup>th</sup> grade needs to come back to Mitchell.
- Early literacy is a huge predictor.

- Staff need to work together.

#### 6. WOODBURY PARENT (CHILDREN WILL NOT BE IMPACTED):

- Equalizing education.
- Disparity dilemma solved.
- Unifies parents.
- True region – not two different towns.

#### 7. PARENT:

- What is the projected growth rate? (Addressed later by BOE member to be no growth rate – mega house development will result in their children going to private schools)
- Space issue needs to be better addressed.

#### 8. BETHLEHEM PARENT(referred to herself as PTO member):

- Growth problem is an issue and this is a band-aid and temporary fix for this issue.
- Unified curriculum is important – more teacher workshops can be held. We can work around this issue.
- Request to go to a referendum and really educate the community.

#### 9. WOODBURY PARENT:

- Support the change – benefits outweigh the drawbacks.
- 10 months to work out the logistical issues.

#### 10. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- Overcrowding issue is not being addressed – the two schools are not the same size and now will be moving the overcrowding to BES.

#### 11. BETHLEHEM PARENT (4 children):

- Parent is for the education of children – but has the impact on Region 14 been researched. Need to really evaluate the impact on children.
- Why isn't the education level the same in both schools? There must be a simpler solution to do what is needed to get the same work base in both schools.

#### 12. WOODBURY PARENT:

- Divided on issue.
- Believes it can make for a better education.

- Busing issue is a tough one for many parents.

#### 13. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- More information on the pros and cons needed as they should want to get the support of the community on this.
- Is the K-2 and 3-5 configuration really the most beneficial to the students?
- Is this a final answer or can we try to renovate to new at Mitchell?
- Referendum needed – suggest both items of configuration change and renovation (if they can put both on a referendum).
- Right now the community is not being given a choice.

#### 14. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- Supports the K-5 model.
- Likes the small town neighborhood feel.
- What about full time working parents – with 3 children and now three buses?

#### 15. WOODBURY PARENT:

- Why isn't the curriculum more unified now – just don't understand why not.
- Why does this need to be decided tonight?
- In order to work for the entire community – people need more information than what came out over the last few weeks.

#### 16. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- Never heard of solving one problem by starting a new problem.
- Portables at Mitchell are not liked, so why bring them to Bethlehem?
- Redistrict
- This is not the answer.

#### 17. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- If curriculum not the same, teachers should be talking to each other more (other ways than just being in same location). Corporations do it all the time, why can't our teachers?
- Buses are not 45 minutes at the longest. Lives two miles from BES and a 50 minute ride.
- Our towns are not set up like other towns that are closer together and do this. Why will it work here?

#### 18. WOODBURY PARENT:

- Supports the change – always amazed at the difference with Bethlehem.
- Kids will handle it fine.

19. WOODBURY PARENT (children at three different schools – youngest child is a fourth grader):

- Supporter – Dr. Cronin has been through redistricting before successfully.

20. WOODBURY PARENT:

- I'm confused – is this being done to make room for the kids or to change the curriculum?

21. BETHLEHEM PARENT (Attended the workshop and has 2 children):

- Risky, bold plan. Messing with what is already working.
- Grappling with these issues for years.
- Make sure that it is something fair to both towns.
- Will have a community impact – participate in activities in the town.
- Elementary – Dr. Cronin doesn't think it will be a problem, but not sure how much he really knows this community yet.
- Researched online - new configuration can lead to higher drop out rates – if we transition this often; increases anonymity. Current configuration builds confidence in children.
- Please do this the right way.
- Great risk and we may end up further set back later.

22. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- This is a huge issue – likes the idea of a referendum.
- K-5 configuration is so special.

23. WOODBURY PARENT:

- Supporter and asks board to approve.
- Tried so many things in the past.
- Bus schedules will be revamped.
- Schools are not equal on every level and need to be.

24. WOODBURY PARENT (3 children):

- Get the parents back who are sending their children to private schools.
- No one is showing how this is fiscally responsible.
- Moving to quick.

25. WOODBURY PARENT (but in BES):

- Try again with Mitchell renovation.
- Transportation issue is huge and not really studied. Son is a seven minute ride to BES and spends 35 minutes now on the bus.
- Geographic limitations in this district. Different community than Naugatuck. Naugatuck is 16 sq miles. Our district is about 50 sq miles.
- Oppressive for a 5 year old to spend an hour on the bus (NOTE: this is making an assumption we will never be able to achieve 45 minutes in bus length with additional miles and same number of buses).

26. WOODBURY PARENT (mother of six children):

- Moved from Newtown to Woodbury.
- Greatest joy for her is watching her older children interact with the younger children.
- 4 different schools next year.
- Logistics do not work.
- Fix Mitchell School.

27. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- Not seeing how space issue is being addressed.
- Shuffling the problem.
- Buddy system in place will be gone.

28. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- 75% of families in district do not have children in schools in this district.
- If Woodbury all voted then whether or not Bethlehem voted it down would not matter. (NOTE: this must be in reference to how Woodbury blames Bethlehem for voting down Woodbury requests for changes to their school).

29. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- Transition: All kids are different – we cannot make blanket statements that they will all handle these transitions well.

30. WOODBURY PARENT (mother of three children 1, 6 and 7):

- Undecided about issue.
- Wants more time.
- Please answer all the questions from tonight before voting.

- What will happen to school start times? (addressed in BOE comments later on)

### 30. WOODBURY PARENT:

- Uniform curriculum: board and staff need to work together to deliver a uniformed curriculum.
- Quantifiable benefits – building change and busing changes – what are the estimated costs?
- Please do not put to a vote until you estimate the cost.
- Busing – will require more stops than we currently have.
- Family problem.
- Likes idea of older children being around to take the younger children through the system (has four children).

### 31. BETHLEHEM PARENT:

- What about the working mother? Stress of three bus stops.
- Kids may be resilient, but will get less quality time with parents.

### 32. WOODBURY PARENT (drove in from home):

- If voted on tonight would be a blind vote.
- We don't have the numbers and need more information.
- Need projections (NOTE: addressed later by BOE member – we won't have any growth. Mega houses will send children to private schools).
- What is the issue – curriculum (administrators can use technology and speak together in other means, rather than moving all these children back and forth) or space?

### 33. PARENT:

- How is it going in Naugatuck since their reconfiguration?
- Many grade levels – not forming the same kind of bond with children because not enough time at one school.

### 34. WOODBURY PARENT:

- Undecided.
- What are the classroom sizes now and later?
- How will special needs be addressed?
- Busing – what about snow days?
- CMT scores – if a big difference – why?
- How does each school have a different curriculum? (NOTE: addressed in later comments that people not understanding the definition of curriculum)

Seems that the management of Region 14 has let us down. (NOTE: it is later noted that the schools follow the same curriculum as given by state, but apparently based on supporter comments – there is a big difference in what one school is getting as an education vs the other).

- How often do staff communicate (if they do)?
- Who has the Board consulted in order to make this decision?
- What other regions are doing this (not towns, but regions with distance between them like ours)?
- Cost of the change – please itemize.
- What do the teachers think?

35. WOODBURY PARENT (Education consultant – talked previously):

- Provided definition of curriculum – learning goals established by the state of CT. Helps every child reach their goals.
- Suggested change will allow teams of teachers to get together in everyday conversation. Currently, they are without daily contact to problem solve. Not a management problem. Teachers just need to talk about how to do better.

36. PARENT:

- Prior referendum to build to new – lost by only 26 votes. Go to referendum one more time.
- Why will this solve our problem?

37. WOODBURY PARENT (talked previously):

- Does the suggested change replace the need for a referendum? NOTE: later addressed that we will still need referendum to make changes even if we reconfigure after tonight's vote.
- We will probably need more money (so will most likely need a referendum): Step 1 – restructuring Step 2 – if the referendum doesn't pass for the money, than what will happen?
- Please provide more information.

38. PARENT (former teacher):

- Having teachers located next to each other won't make the difference being talked about.
- Teachers within current schools can talk now, so why does it make a difference to now have 8 teachers that can talk?

**Above is the last of questions asked from the audience, which concluded at 10:00 pm.**

## Feedback from Dr. Cronin and BOE Members:

The following are some of the replies from Dr. Cronin and the BOE members regarding the school reconfiguration item on the agenda:

### DR. CRONIN:

- He believes in reconfiguration. People want K-12 and this is what I am giving you. **NOTE: I don't understand how this fits people's definitions,**
- SCARE TACTIC: Some suggested this was a scare tactic. He doesn't do this.
- Believes it is educationally sound.
- Most effective for development in schools – teachers talking to each other.
- CURRICULUM: Misunderstanding of curriculum – one school does not have a better curriculum over another.
- 5<sup>th</sup> grade move back from the Middle school – this is a suggestion for that.
- SPACE ISSUES: Never said this will take away the space issues. This allows us to function in spite of space issues.
- REFERENDUM: Always said we still need to reevaluate and address Mitchell with referendum.
- TRANSPORTATION: Transportation issue – since many over 45 minutes now – will want to change this.
- COST ESTIMATE: Cannot know all the costs now.
- SPACE ISSUE: Agrees we will run out of space.

### INDIVIDUAL SPOKE ABOUT TRANSPORTATION:

- 3 tier being looked at (Middle and High School; BES; MES)
- 18 buses now and will still have 18 buses.
- Additional cost of gas, but not having to add buses – \$40,000 to \$50,000 estimate.

### BOARD MEMBER 1:

- We hired an educational leader in Dr. Cronin. Asked him to take an objective look. He reviewed it and I believe he will make it work.
- Community perspective – will make one community.
- Financially will be more efficient, but not the reason she is voting yes.
- Move forward tonight and votes yes.

### BOARD MEMBER 2 (retired and many years experience in education):

- Teachers and daily contact amongst them – paramount that teachers talk to each other.
- Worked at Naugatuck (about 3 years) and it was good for teachers to talk.

- Population growth – No increase is being anticipated. People coming in and building the “mega houses” will send their kids to private schools.
- Supports the program.

#### BOARD MEMBER 3:

- Mitchell renovations must be done so we will need another referendum.
- Transportation does not seem to be a big issue. Same length – only the routes will change.
- Researched and supports this.

#### BOARD MEMBER 4:

- Trusts Bob Cronin. **He spent a week at all the facilities.**
- Supports the proposal.

#### BOARD MEMBER 5:

- **Saw the proposal for the first time on October 4, 2006.**
- Wanted more information. He has had 12 days to think about this.
- A lot of stuff not tangible.
- Streamlining has to reduce costs.
- How do we fit the same number of students in the same space without portables?
- OPEN items for him:
  1. Continue to work on the business case in a lot of detail that this is sound. More needs to be seen.
  2. Appoint one person as project manager.
  3. Focus on the transition years.
  4. Proactive communication plan.
- Supports the proposal.

#### BOARD MEMBER 6:

- Supports the proposal.

#### BOARD MEMBER 7:

- Significant discussion on the positive effects on the library.
- Supports the proposal.

#### BOARD MEMBER 8:

- Supports the proposal.

