

December 1, 2006

Dear Region 14 Parents and Community Members,

In our effort to gain a better understanding of the proposed Region 14 reconfiguration, we have uncovered a great deal of information that remains relatively unknown to the greater public. We would like to take this opportunity to share some of this information.

Fact:

The Region 14 Board of Education has repeatedly suggested that the reconfiguration option has been extensively studied in the past; we have not found any evidence to support that statement. Quite the contrary, it seems, based on previous reports to the board, the reconfiguration option was repeatedly abandoned due to a number of obvious disadvantages. Please consider the following reports from the board of education as they pertain to the question of reconfiguration.

1.) In a Region 14 Board of Education report entitled “**Region Facilities and Space Needs Assessment Study May 17, 2005,**” the reconfiguration option was listed as **Option J (the last option out of 20)** Please note that in Option J there are two advantages listed, including “Educationally Sound ?” and five disadvantages listed, including (curiously) “Educationally Sound ?” The May 17th report was not referenced on page 2 of Dr. Cronin’s adopted Reconfiguration plan, but is available for viewing at the Woodbury Town Clerk’s Office. It can also be viewed on our Website www.saveregion14elementary.com under related links.

Option J

Move 3rd, 4th & 5th grades from BES to MES. Move K, 1st & 2nd grades from MES to BES and renovate BES and MES.

BES, K-2; MES, 3-5; WMS, 6-8; NHS, 9-12

Advantages

- Maintains status quo based on proposed 2005-06 grade realignment
- Educationally Sound?

Disadvantages

- Educationally Sound?
- Addition required at BES
- Difficult to renovate BES and MES while occupied (swing space required)
- Transportation of students
- BES has limited expansion space

Estimated total cost \$34.5 million

2.) Similarly, in a BOE document listed on page 2 of Dr. Cronin's Reconfiguration Plan, "**Why should we move the Region 14 5th grade Classes to the Woodbury Middle School????**" the following was stated in relation to the reconfiguration option:

Reconfiguring the grades at all Kindergarten through 8 levels and redistributing the student population between Bethlehem and Woodbury:

1. The total population K-8 will still have to be serviced between the two schools of Bethlehem Elementary and Mitchell school [and WMS] , which do not have adequate facilities for that critical mass of over 900 children.
2. Adding another school into the K-8 program adds one more transition to the children, again at critical points in their educational development.
3. The associated busing costs would be significant.
4. The Mitchell School building is not viable in the long term, due to the functional constraints.

Fact:

The administration has repeatedly suggested that the proposed K-2/3-5 configuration at the elementary level will advance the education of our children. In our previous newsletter to parents and community members, we presented a number of research studies that seriously question the use of such grade span configurations as a means to achieve educational ends, primarily because they introduce another transition at a "critical point" in our children's "educational development," a fact our own school board previously considered to be very important but now disregards.

In order to understand the issue more thoroughly, we felt it would be helpful to examine CT schools that practice the grade span configurations in question to try and determine which schools are more effective. Such a study has not been done by the board of education; similarly, Dr. Cronin does not have experience with the proposed configuration as Naugatuck actually has six K-4 configurations at the elementary level. Also, the K-2/3-5 configuration is in fact, one of the least practiced both in CT and the United States as a whole; therefore, this is relatively uncharted territory for all parties concerned, most significantly for our children.

Obviously the best (perhaps only) objective means to determine educational effectiveness is to examine test scores, as such, we examined the 2005/06 fourth grade CMT test scores of the schools in the state of Connecticut that follow the three grade span configurations in question; the proposed K-2/3-5 option; the K-4 option (currently in place at MES); and the K-5 option (currently in place at BES).

We examined 31 examples of the K-2/3-5 and K-3/ 4-5 configuration. We studied both examples as they both represent elementary schools with an additional transition; The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) groups these schools in a similar fashion and following their lead enabled us to expand the sample space to include a greater number of schools. We also examined 33 K-4 examples as well as 60 examples of the K-5 configuration. The variable that proved to have a significant impact on test scores, regardless of the configuration in place, was the number of students in each school eligible for free or reduced price school lunches, which is one indicator of the student economic level (or family income level) at a school. Therefore, we chose to categorize the schools according to this statistic. Currently in Woodbury and Bethlehem, less than 10% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch (4% and 3.7% respectively); therefore, in order to properly examine schools with students of comparable income levels; we studied every K-2/3-5, K4, and K5 configuration in the state with less than 10% of students eligible for the lunch program ; these schools are the primary focus of our study and represent 22 K-2/3-5 (K-3/4-5) schools; 27 K-4 schools; and 51 K-5 schools. The other examples are offered only to provide a comparison in terms of the lower income level schools.

The Report follows:

The schools with less than 10% of the students eligible for free or reduced price school lunches are highlighted and are the primary focus of this report. The average CMT scores reflect the percentage of students within these schools meeting or exceeding the state proficiency level in reading, writing, and math. We derived our data from GreatSchools.net and the CT State Department of Education.

For anyone less than familiar with the terms of statistics:

Mean is simply average

N is the number of schools

CONFIG	INCOME		RSCORES	WSCORES	MSCORES
K2	Between 0-10%	Mean	78.90%	86.00%	87.36%
	N	22			
	Between 10%-20%	Mean	72.86%	86.14%	81.28%
	N	7			
	Between 20%-30%	Mean	55.00%	70.50%	76.50%
	N	2			
	Total	Mean	76.00%	85.03%	85.29%
	N	31			
K4	Between 0-10%	Mean	84.26%	91.37%	91.07%
	N	27			
	Between 10%-20%	Mean	78.50%	85.75%	88.75%
	N	4			
	Between 20%-30%	Mean	58.00%	70.50%	69.00%
	N	2			
	Total	Mean	81.97%	89.42%	89.45%
	N	33			
K5	Between 0-10%	Mean	84.27%	91.69%	91.84%
	N	51			
	Between 10%-20%	Mean	78.00%	89.38%	88.75%
	N	8			
	Between 20%-30%	Mean	79.00%	82.00%	81.00%
	N	1			
	Total	Mean	83.35%	91.22%	91.25%
	N	60			
Total	Between 0-10%	Mean	82.97%	90.42%	90.66%
	N	100			
	Between 10%-20%	Mean	76.21%	87.42%	86.00%
	N	19			
	Between 20%-30%	Mean	61.00%	72.80%	74.40%

Total	N	5	Mean	81.05%	89.25%	89.29%
	N	124				

Results:

The K-4 and K-5 schools are almost exactly even in terms of CMT tests scores, whereas the K-2/3-5 schools are four to five percentage points lower on average in each category.

Configuration	Income	Number	Reading CMT	Writing CMT	Math CMT
K2/3-5	Between 0-10%	N 22	78.90%	86.00%	87.36%
K4	Between 0-10%	N 29	84.26%	91.37%	91.07%
K5	Between 0-10%	N 51	84.27%	91.69%	91.84%

We found that CT schools of the K-2/3-5 configuration have consistently lower CMT test scores in reading, writing, and math than either the K-4 or K-5 configurations at similar income levels.

To read this study in its entirety and to view the data file (i.e. schools and CMT scores), and to view relevant bar graphs, please check out Grade Span Configuration Study under related links on our website www.saveregion14elementary.com.

In Summary:

Based on the information contained in previous board reports and the results of the grade span configuration study, several questions come to mind.

1. Why are we embarking on a proposal that was previously dismissed by the board?
2. How and why did option J become option A?
3. The Board of Education and the Region 14 Administration continue to insist that this is the best plan to promote the educational interests of our children; why don't Connecticut CMT tests scores reflect this?

4. Why has the board refused to return to the original renovation project? In a November 15th *Voices* article entitled, “For Region 14 Students: Schools’ Reconfiguration Draws Questions,” Dr. Cronin references a future referendum of thirty million dollars to “accommodate the intermediate school needs.” Why are we being asked to fund a similarly priced renovation project at the expense of our community based elementary schools?

5. Why have we rushed to judgment on an issue that has such a profound impact on our communities and our children?

We are currently working with a number of families from both Woodbury and Bethlehem that continue to demand answers to these questions. Please join us, and attend the next board meeting Tuesday, December 5th at 7:30 PM at Nonnewaug High School. For more information or to contact us to get involved please go to www.saveregion14elementary.com or simply respond to this email.

Best Regards,
Erica Barber
Families for Region 14 Elementary

It is our hope that parents, regardless of their ultimate decision, want to be educated and informed during this process; however, if you would like to be removed from our mailing list, simply reply to this email with “REMOVE” in the subject line and we will gladly take you off our mailing list.

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