



PLYMOUTH PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
CENTRAL OFFICE  
27 NORTH HARWINTON AVENUE  
TERRYVILLE, CONNECTICUT 06786

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of Plymouth Public Schools is to challenge, inspire, and prepare all students for success in an ever-changing and complex world.

PLYMOUTH BOARD OF EDUCATION  
SPECIAL MEETING - RETREAT  
TERRYVILLE HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY  
33 NORTH HARWINTON AVENUE  
TERRYVILLE, CT 06786  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2020

## MINUTES

Present: Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani, Mr. Elsaghir, Mr. Foote, Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Kulesa, Mr. Seaman, Mr. Showers

Absent: Mrs. Kimmel, Mrs. Lucian

Also Present: Dr. Semmel, Superintendent, Mrs. Parsons, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, Ms. Aronheim, Director of Pupil Personnel & Special Education Services, Mr. Hendrickson, Business Manager, Mr. Hults, Principal THS, Ms. Suffridge, Principal EJTMS, Mrs. Turner, Principal PCS

### 1. Call to Order & Pledge to the Flag

Chair Seaman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The group joined in the Pledge to the Flag.

### 2. Adoption of the Agenda

**MOTION:** To adopt the agenda as presented by Mr. Showers, seconded Mr. Foote and the vote unanimous.

### 3. Board of Education Discussion of Options and Next Steps

Dr. Semmel reviewed timeline of events up to tonight where after presentations, meetings and voted to do work on Options 1 and 5. His presentation tonight will cover the remaining two options and answer questions of the Board or will find the answers. He is working at scheduling a meeting with Thomaston's Superintendent, Board Chair, Selectman, our Mayor, Board Chair and himself. Dr. Semmel presented his PowerPoint beginning with:

**Option 1:**

one elementary school will be pre-K -2 and the other 3-5

middle and high schools remain the same

Overall findings of Options 1A and 1B:

All grade level teachers are together in one school enabling them to work on instruction, discuss students

Bus transportation and time to complete routes needs further discussion – policy reviewed on advantages and challenges

All buses at each school at the same time or drop off by half buses at one school and then switch

School day start/time need further discussion

Same start time or staggered

Drop some students off early requiring supervision

Parents of “walkers” can drop one grade level and then get to other school with sibling (s)

Extracurricular opportunities, more clubs for younger students

**Option 5:**

More complicated as one school would be closed with overall savings to close ETJMS approximately \$400,000

If give that building back to the town, the town still needs to maintain it i.e. heating, security.

Roofs in all buildings are getting older

Mathematically all students can fit but it is tighter than NESDEC put; population may decrease in 2026-2027

Advantages/Disadvantages:

Grade 7-12 in one building – need for social workers, counselors

May need to add modular classrooms; teachers may need to teach from a cart

Shared classrooms

Tech Department does more with high school vs elementary but will need to relocate to PCS

Central Office will need to relocate

Flow plan of THS space use reviewed; auditorium to be used as classroom; all schedules will need planning; go to an 8-period day

Athletics scheduling will be a challenge – reviewed; use of other gyms not always appropriate for middle/high school age in terms of size and safety

Other considerations:

Grade 6 to FES – current classroom size/space reviewed and may require elimination of teacher workroom, move band back to the stage in the gym, eliminate computer lab

**4. Board of Education Discussion on Options and Next Steps**

\*Hearing impaired teacher with PreK-2 and 3-5 and how that will be managed

\*Athletics – some kids get to do spring sports and if we go with Option 5, can we bring younger ones on the field.

\*Concern Apple 4 and have Apple 3 have specific needs and transition, middle school kids need almost as much space

\*Option 5 is max with space and that is if the study is correct and enrollment declines, study is only a projection; Option 5 does not seem viable

\*If we talk with Thomaston and look at NESDEC, in the next year or two we would be able to house a regional high school

\*Bringing 7 & 8 up, talking two programs and this building was not built for that

\*Things that do not show on map is to keep academic integrity, there are certain resources in a class you need available. There would no longer be common planning time for core department teachers; the more restrictions on a schedule the more the scheduling jams up,

i.e. kids getting into AP classes

\*There is no special education classroom on the map and currently 7 resource teachers between middle and high school; could reconfigure space and need to look at more in depth.

\*Option 5 has too many moving parts

**MOTION:** To eliminate Option 5 by Mrs. Johnson; second Mr. Foote. Discussion: Mr. Elsaghir stated he has some questions on this and would like motion withdrawn to discuss.

Chair Seaman asked that the Motion be withdrawn and opened discussion back for further questions.

(1) What was savings on closing Main Street School. Dr. Semmel responded the cost to run that building was approximately \$70,000 per year and because of concern of boiler system about to quit and need to replace roof, heating and a/c and poor air quality resulted in decision to close. (2) Do any districts use portables around us. Mrs. Johnson stated Waterbury and Naugatuck. Dr. Semmel stated during discussion on portable classrooms, concern of where they would be put due to layout of property and fire protection system would have to be in those classrooms and at a cost. (3) Is it unreasonable to think that while this is an official BOE, that type of vote is done at the next regular Board meeting with more people as this is a retreat and feels strange to do in this type of meeting. Chair Seaman stated he does not see a difference.

**MOTION:** To eliminate Option 5 by Mrs. Johnson; second Mr. Showers. Discussion: Mr. Elsaghir stated his only thought is he has no idea on which option is best and as we hired a Superintendent to give recommendations and trust his opinion more than his own gut instinct. In the end it comes to trust administration to make the right decision and seems although no specific recommendation is it safe to say you (Dr. Semmel) would recommend to not move forward with Option 5. Dr. Semmel responded in the end, it is the Board's decision on this. When Option 5 was on the table he was open minded to it potentially working as it could save the town money but more we dug into it, it became the desk got stacked against Option 5. He would not recommend moving toward Option 5 if he is being asked the direct question. If the Board were to move toward Option 5, would ask to wait to delay and see as a possible option for years 2026-2027 and a conversation with Thomaston, if going into regionalization. Mr. Showers stated his fear is closing a school and in 5 years we need it. Mr. Elsaghir stated thinking it is good if, as a board member, trust the Superintendent and he did due diligence, Option 5 is a bad option now, he will vote in favor of the motion. With no further discussion, Chair Seaman called for a vote. All in favor and motion passes.

Board member discussion on Option 1:

\*PreK-2 at PCS and 3-5 at FES how will it work with teachers. Dr. Semmel stated he will need to work with teacher union as we will make sure contract is being followed and will have discussions on what is happening; contract reviewed noting we have been posting positions as district wide. We need flexibility and would work with union and make sure on the same page. Seniority is in contract, it gets complicated but is doable.

\*Foresee any issue with classifications. Dr. Semmel stated that would be part of it as some are K-6, there are PreK certifications; most "K" certifications can teach grade 5. He would work with the CEA rep and leadership. Mrs. Parsons stated this can happen on a year to year basis as every teacher can be reassigned by the principal within the building.

\*Assume you will have same positions but for whatever reason they decide you need to go from 7<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup>, it can be done. Dr. Semmel responded they would take into consideration what teachers want for example if we were to lose a 5<sup>th</sup> grade and we are happy with how they teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade, we will try to keep them there but cannot promise. If they want to stay within a specific school, they might be able to stay at same grade level.

Dr. Semmel stated one option is to do nothing. We have talked about advantages of Option 1, but you do not have to go in that direction. Chair Seaman stated he would like to continue to explore Option 1 and will schedule another opportunity for the public to speak on Option 1. Discussion held on need to include All-Star on bus routes to include length of time students will be on the bus, cost to add another route/bus and would another bus greatly alleviate time on the bus, actual timing of drop off at both elementary schools, line up of buses.

Dr. Semmel stated working on this to get everything figured out by no later than October 2020 as then we would be ready to include in 2021-2022 budget and there can be checkpoints along the way. The Board stated they would like to hear what the teachers have to say. Ideally a decision from the Board will be needed after a public forum, bus routes, staffing (add and/or reallocate), are we increase resources utilizing teachers and expanding what we have, construction costs (i.e. moving PreK from FES to PCS as now "K" bathrooms at FES will need to be changed. Dr. Semmel stated concern on Option 1 is academic consistency we can get and what is best for instruction and the kids; concern is busing, having all grade level teachers and support staff as well as coaches; FES is a Title 1 school and PCS is not and will that all balance out. Feel we will need to add a counselor for grade 5 students. Mrs. Kulesa stated she would eventually like to see something for gifted and talented kids.

Chair Seaman opened the discussion for public comment:

- \*Can this work or discussions be opened to parents and include them on the committee
- \*Would like to hear what administrators from elementary schools think as we have a new one doing an amazing job but did hire as PreK-5<sup>th</sup> and coming into a district like this is not easy
- \*Thought on kids entering grade 6 come from 2 different schools and now maybe preK-2 and 3-5 and what do you think that would look like in middle school
- \*Is there another benchmark for districts that have something set up this way.

Dr. Semmel stated the administrative team did speak on these topics and are on the same page. Mrs. Turner stated she has experience in the various grades and came from preK-3 school. Ms. Suffridge stated you have all students getting very similar curriculum and with 3-5, she knows exactly what she can count on and consistency will only help and not two separate cultures.

\*Will elementary administrators stay at their building. Mrs. Turner stated she will do whatever is needed and wherever is the best fit for her she is happy to do.

\*Start time if staggered, parents have to plan more carefully for kids; if FES starts 20 minutes later, parents going to work may now have to rely on childcare so that they can get to work on time. Mrs. Parsons stated all K-5 get picked up at the same time. Staggering times to start/end may affect walkers.

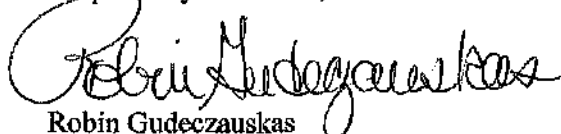
\*Would PCS start before or after FES as PCS starting earlier would be more beneficial option as younger kids would have less time on the bus. Dr. Semmel stated times will be a discussion of the principals.

Mrs. Kulesa stated she encourages everyone to be brutally honest and say why they feel things; do not worry about what the board might be thinking. Chair Seaman stated this comes to communication and we have emails, robo calls, newsletters with information on the public hearing but it is the responsibility of parents to open communication they receive from principals, teachers and other administration, Facebook, email blasts.

##### 5. Adjournment

**MOTION:** Motion to adjourn at 7:45 p.m. by Mr. Foote; seconded Mr. Showers and the vote unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,



Robin Gudczauskas  
Recording Secretary  
Plymouth Board of Education