

May 26, 2015

Dr. Portia Bonner, Superintendent of Schools
35 Wheelbarrow Lane
East Haven, CT 06512

Re: East Haven Schools Consolidation Plan

Dear Dr. Bonner:

Kindly take this letter as a follow-up regarding the school district reconfiguration plan recently presented to the Board of Education by Silver-Petrucelli Associates.

In sending you this letter, I want to make it clear that I do not wish to stifle your enthusiasm for improving the district or discourage you from further pursuing a consolidation plan. Rather, I wish to offer some constructive recommendations regarding the plan presented by Silver-Petrucelli along with some advice for ensuring that, moving forward, parents and residents will be as excited about this plan as I know you are.

Let me begin by noting that the plan presented to the Board of Education is certainly an important first step in the process of upgrading and consolidating our schools. However, put simply, the Silver-Petrucelli plan pertains only to 'bricks and mortar' improvements. It is simply a facilities study.

However, since its presentation to the Board, a number parents and residents have contacted my office with concerns about the plan.

In reviewing the plan myself, and in speaking to parents and residents, I've noted several aspects of the plan that I would recommend revisiting, reviewing, and fine-tuning. Specifically:

1. The plan does not address expanding curriculum or the hiring of additional specialty teachers or paraprofessionals to facilitate better one-on-one education of our children.
2. It does not discuss how the reconfigured grades and classes will impact any aspect of our children's educational experience, even down to basic issues such as transportation, lunch, or athletics.
3. The plan does not address how, if at all, it will produce any operating savings to the Town or the Board of Education (one of the primary reasons the district is looking to consolidate).
4. The plan cites over \$32.7 million dollars in 'soft,' unidentifiable costs associated with the reconfiguration.

Additionally and perhaps most troubling, parents have voiced concerns about feeling 'left out' of the consolidation deliberations despite having raised substantive, valid concerns about how the plan will impact their children. I raise this issue not to point blame, but to highlight the obvious need for greater parent and resident involvement in this process before it moves any further.

It is undeniable that this project will shape the way we educate our children for generations to come. As a result, it is imperative that before we forge ahead with any plan, we make every effort to solicit the input of concerned parents and residents. Further, it is imperative that when we move forward with a plan, we do so with more than a facilities plan. Any final reconfiguration plan should be a global, substantive plan that addresses not only facilities, but lays out a clear roadmap for the educational/athletic future of our district.

Accordingly, in lieu of pushing this plan forward at this time, I am recommending the following:

1. That the Board of Education conduct no less than three (3) public hearings (perhaps one in Momauguin, one in the Center, and one in Foxon) to solicit input from parents and residents about the proposed plan and to accept recommendations for alternatives to the plan;
2. That the final plan be evaluated by the Board of Education, the Superintendent, and Assistant Superintendent Forti insofar as to how the reconfiguration will address expansion of curriculum/technology. Any evaluation should include concrete goals and cost estimates for improving curriculum, including increased personnel costs (if any);
3. That any final plan should address, with greater specificity, the costs of the project, as it is simply unacceptable to move forward with a \$90 million dollar project when over one-third of the costs are identified as 'soft.'

At this juncture, I feel it would be unwise and unfair to both the parents and residents to move the consolidation plan forward without soliciting additional, substantive input about what the residents feel is the best way to move the school district forward. Quite frankly, at \$90 million dollars and even with 66% reimbursement, this project would represent a \$30 million dollar undertaking (and a +/- \$43.6 million dollar bond repayment). It is critical that before we commit to expending those monies, we ensure that we have a plan that everyone can be proud of. As a result, it is my intention to forego introducing a funding ordinance for this plan at this time, at least until the Board has solicited greater input from parents as to their feelings about the plan.

As we move forward with a plan to upgrade and consolidate our schools, we should certainly rely on the expert advice of firms like Silver-Petrucelli. However, at the same time, any final, adopted plan should reflect the will of the people, especially the parents whose children will be intimately affected by the changes to our district. I am confident that additional research by you, Assistant Superintendent Forti, and the Board, along with input from the public, will allow the Board to craft a plan that will increase educational opportunities for our children while, at the same time, reducing overall costs to the Town.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours,

Joseph Maturo, Jr.,
Mayor