

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Maturo Returns School Consolidation Plan to Board of Education, Calls for Additional Public Hearings and Greater Resident Input on Plan**

Mayor Joseph Maturo, Jr. announced today that until the Board of Education holds additional public hearings and conducts additional research regarding a recently presented school consolidation plan, he will forego introducing an ordinance to fund the plan in light of concerns raised by parents since the plan was presented to and reviewed by the Board of Education.

In a letter to Superintendent of Schools Dr. Portia Bonner dated May 26<sup>th</sup>, Maturo explained, “[t]he 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.”

After offering a variety of suggestions regarding the consolidation plan, Maturo goes on to note that “[a]t 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.”

The consolidation study, which was created by Silver-Petrucelli Associates and was presented to the Town on April 21<sup>st</sup>, calls for consolidating the Town’s six elementary schools to three. It calls for the re-configuration of the middle school to accommodate grades five through seven and for moving the eighth grade to a separate wing of the Town’s high school.

In elaborating on his concerns, Maturo cited four particularly noteworthy concerns, including that:

- “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.”

However, pointing to the need to greater public input regarding the plan, Maturo noted that “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.”

In order for any consolidation plan to move forward, a bonding ordinance to fund the project would have to be introduced by the Mayor to the Board of Finance and Town Council. In its present form, the \$90 million dollar plan, assuming 66% state reimbursement, would represent a \$30 million dollar borrowing. At four (4) percent interest, such a bond would represent a cost of \$43.6 million dollars to the taxpayers over 20 years. Stated in mills, and not including increased technology and employee costs, the project would represent nearly a 2-mill (6.3%) increase in taxes if passed as-is

Maturo continued, "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."

In his letter to the Superintendent, Maturo recommended that the Board of Education conduct no less than three (3) additional public hearings on the plan, that it be reviewed and expanded to include a plan to expand curriculum, and that the costs of the plan be better reviewed and identified.

In concluding his letter to Superintendent Bonner, Maturo explained, "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-Petrucci. 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."

*For additional information, please contact Frank Gentilesco, Jr. at 203-468-3204.*