



## ROCHESTER SCHOOL

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### **The Rochester School Board Comments Re: High School Sustainability Report**

The Rochester School Board held a warned Special Meeting Wed., October 23, at the Elementary School from 6-8 PM. This meeting was a Board Work Session to discuss the report by the contracted consultant, John Everett, “ to investigate options for sustainability, both educationally and financially.” The Board met electronically through “Skype” with John Everett to ask questions and discuss the report findings. After the electronic conference concluded, the Board discussed this report.

The Board’s comments will accompany the complete twenty-two (22) page report and the Summary Report. It will be mailed to all families.. There will be also be copies located at both school offices, and the Town Hall Offices. The reports will be posted on the website.

There will be a Rochester School Community Forum warned as a Special Board Meeting for Thursday, Nov. 14, at 6 PM, held in the Rochester School Gymnasium. The public is encouraged to attend as Mr. John Everett will be present to answer any questions from the community.

Below are two (2) of the main focus questions of the report. The Board wishes to express key comments to the Rochester School Community as a result of their work session and conversation with Mr. Everett:

#### **Question 1. What needs to happen in order for the secondary program to grow and attract more students?**

**Option #1 - Leave Rochester School Open and “grow” Rochester High School** - The report states that if the school remains open then the school must grow not only to offer more opportunities for students, but to make it financially sound without increasing taxpayer cost. We must attract more area students and offer educational alternatives to increase school enrollment and offerings. The staff are highly motivated and are committed to Rochester School students and community. Community efforts through the Strategic Planning Committee contribute valuable support and ideas to enhance and strengthen Rochester School. The Board acknowledges there is a sense of encouragement that the high school can and will grow based on indications and events in the last several months.

#### **Question 2: If the school does not grow, what are the options for students and what are the tax consequences? The report’s findings state that there are three options if Rochester High was to close:**

- **A. Designate a high school:** The report concluded that Rochester students would benefit from increased opportunities and association with larger groups of students while maintaining academic opportunities and holding the per pupil cost to a reasonable increase. The Board would designate another high school to send the students to.
- **B. School choice:** Eliminate the high school program and turn over the responsibility for public high school education to other schools. Families would “choose” the school their child would attend. Families would be responsible for transporting their students to that school, but if enough families chose a particular school, then perhaps group transportation could be arranged by the receiving school.
- **C. Joint contract high school** – A joint contract between one or more area schools governed by a board made up of the partner school districts (such as South Royalton or Bethel).

**3. Financial Impact** - Mr. Everett concluded that the financial impacts of closing Rochester High School would increase costs rather than decrease them for the community. Based on the report's rough estimate and using the current high school enrollment, it would cost approximately \$176,000 more than the current annual budget to close the high school. This does not include the costs of transportation or special education.

**4: Leadership** - The report states and the Board acknowledges that the repeated turnover in leadership has played a role in the current state of the high school. With the most recent change in leadership, there is the perception of positive forward motion. The current principal is committed and passionate about Rochester School's students and community. The school has a large active "School Improvement Team" that works closely with the State Dept. of Education "coach" to help strengthen the school's academic and leadership growth.

The report also states that the public's perception of the Board, through previous votes, public comments, etc. has expressed an unclear message and clouded the true mission of the Board. The Rochester School Board members are committed to creating a more unified, positive, professional student-centered model, building community support and confidence to continue the engagement of community members, and parents. The Board members will be participating in a Vermont School Boards member training in the next few months to assist with this.

**5. Next Steps** - The Rochester Board looks forward to hearing the community voices on Thursday, Nov. 14 in the Gymnasium. This meeting will help demonstrate whether in the words of Mr. Everett, "The Board and the community can envision a transformed high school that would be acceptable and even prized." There will be a moderator present to help ensure that all voices will be heard. We hope you will be able to join us.

Sincerely,

Jolanta Labejsza, Chair  
Jeff Sherwin, Vice Chair  
Doug Gorton, Clerk  
Bill Cotell  
Mason Wade