

BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES

Date of Meeting: August 13, 2025
Type of Meeting: **JOINT MEETING OF THE TROY CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT AND WYNANTSKILL UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARDS OF EDUCATION**
Location: Troy Middle School - Auditorium
Time: 7:00 PM

I. Call to Order

A. Roll Call

- Members Present: Mr. Joshua Chiappone Mr. Donald Miller
Mr. Matthew Flowers, Jr. Mrs. Elizabeth Poletto
Mrs. Diana Heckman Mrs. Ebony Pompey-Conway
Ms. Davina Mayo-Dunham Mr. Nathanael Wootten
- Members Absent: Mr. Thomas Mayo
- Others Present: Mr. John Carmello, Superintendent
Mr. Frank Barile, School Attorney

B. Public Session

- At 7:01pm, Mrs. Pompey-Conway called the regular meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Following the Pledge, Ms. Pompey-Conway welcomes the board members and administration from the Wynantskill Union Free School District. She goes on to say that our communities are more than neighbors, but longtime partners, and look forward to our students participating in merged sports for the first time in the fall. She appreciates everyone joining tonight for this important conversation about the future.

II. Non-Action Items

- #### A. Reorganization Discussion - led by Dr. Gladys Cruz, Questar III BOCES, NYSED representatives, and Superintendents Yodis and Carmello.

Troy Superintendent, Mr. Carmello, introduces himself stating that this will be his 21st year in Troy and 13th year as Superintendent, a position he is very proud to hold. He explains that there are two guest speakers tonight; District Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Gladys Cruz and David Elliott from the New York State Education Department. At this point, he turns the floor over to Dr. Gladys Cruz.

Dr. Gladys Cruz, Questar III BOCES District Superintendent, explains to the audience about how she helps local superintendents and school boards facilitate discussions about a wide variety of topics impacting their school communities. Her role and the role of the BOCES is to serve as a neutral resource, providing information, resources and assistance as you consider all angles of this complex and significant topic. She goes on to explain that prior to tonight's meeting, they held a meeting of both Superintendents Carmello and Yodis, leaders at the BOCES and representatives from the New York State Education Department, including David Elliott, who is the coordinator of Educational Services. She thanks David for attending tonight, providing guidance and serving as a resource to ensure that we follow state regulations. Ultimately, the school boards must decide whether to pursue a joint feasibility study to see if this is an appropriate step for both of your school communities. Dr. Cruz closes by stating that everyone at the BOCES is here to help support you and your school communities and assist you with making an informed decision.

Mr. Carmello thanks Dr. Cruz for her remarks and introduces the Wynantskill School Board President, Nicole Hurbanek.

Wynantskill UFSD Board President, Nichole Hurbanek, thanks the Troy City School District Board for hosting tonight's meeting. As the Board President, she attests that this meeting is the culmination of a significant and introspective journey for our district of the last two months. She explains that they have engaged deeply with our community, staff, students, families and residents through an optimization study that included in-person forums, individual and small group interviews, as well as remote meetings and surveys. In addition to stakeholder feedback, a comprehensive review and analysis of achievement data outside of quantitative data was conducted, including state aid runs, enrollment trends and student achievement data, and a wide range of financial metrics. What emerged from that review was a powerful affirmation of our close knit community and the high quality, personalized education provided, however, the study also unequivocally highlighted the significant fiscal pressures and limitations Wynantskill faces in expanding academic and extracurricular offerings due to our size. She notes that the Wynantskill community expressed a clear desire for expanded opportunities for students, particularly at the middle school and for long term financial stability. The optimization study identified a potential merger with a suitable educational partner, specifically mentioning the Troy City School District. Our consultants also recommend that the district pursue a reorganization feasibility study with Troy, pending a mutual agreement from both school boards. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to have a conversation to gauge interest in a joint feasibility study. If initiated, this study would conduct a thorough analysis of both districts projected enrollments and staffing program offerings, curriculum, transportation, and the potential fiscal impacts of reorganization, including state aid expenditures and local tax implications.

Mr. Carmello thanked Ms. Hurbanek for her remarks and welcomed David Elliott from the New York State Education Department to speak.

David Elliot from the NYS Education Department begins by thanking everyone in attendance tonight and the invitation to speak about the topic of school district reorganization which is not the easiest topic to discuss. Mr. Elliott explains that 200 years ago there were an estimated 11,000 independent school districts in New York State, by 1956 due to consolidation or reorganization this number shrank to about 1,500 and today there are currently about 700 active districts. Population is a huge factor that drives the ability to effectively operate a school district. If there are more residents, there will be more children, and a greater tax base to support the expenses to operate the school district. The changes in population, coupled with the increasing operational costs overall, presents a challenge to residents, that would be financially, socially and emotionally to provide school age children with the best possible education. By sharing services and expenses that a school district encounters with its neighbors, that is one way to operate, to optimize a school district, which Troy and Wynantskill do already, not only directly but also through the BOCES. Sometimes a formal reorganization can provide a significant benefit to school districts that cannot be realized through other means. Reorganized school districts can achieve greater economies of scale and cost less to operate than two or more districts individually, and with the assistance of the incentives that are provided in the law and the number one priority of the Education Department is to ensure that all school aged children have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed into adulthood. The decision to reorganize a school district is not an easy one and should only be considered carefully and deliberately. The Commissioner of Education will not order a reorganization without ample evidence that the residents of those districts support reorganization. Both Troy and Wynantskill will vote tonight to approve a feasibility study, which over the next several months will look at all aspects of the current district and explore options for a merger. Once the report is complete, the districts will provide information to the public asking for support for a reorganization. If that is favorable, the Wynantskill residents will have the opportunity to vote on whether the school district should be annexed by Troy, if the vote results are favorable, then the Troy School Board will resolve to accept the proposal and the Commissioner of Education would then order the consolidation of the two school districts.

In review, there are steps to take to explore if a reorganization is favorable. Tonight is the first step by both the Troy and Wynantskill Boards of Education meeting to discuss whether or not to formally explore reorganization through a feasibility study. The next step would be conducting the feasibility study. After this study is completed and the Boards of Education decide to continue, there will be town hall meetings and informational sessions to

ensure that the community is involved with this process. Both districts will assess community support by petition and these petitions will be reviewed by the District Superintendent, Dr. Cruz who will write a letter of support for reorganization to the Commissioner of Education. Following that, a public vote will be held by Wynantskill and Troy needs to accept the results of Wynantskill's vote. The final piece would be the Commissioner of Education issuing a final order to accept the reorganization.

There is a financial incentive with the reorganization of school districts. In this case, additional aid over a 14 year period if Wynantskill and Troy reorganized will equal approximately \$240 million. State aid on any new capital projects would also increase to approximately 98% aid reimbursement. Mr. Elliott goes on to say the Education Department, Dr. Cruz and Questar BOCES will continue to serve as a neutral and independent source of information, and will support the needs of both school districts throughout this process.

Troy Superintendent, John Carmello thanks everyone for their input tonight and continues the discussion by saying this is an exciting time for both districts and communities. He also states that Gardner Dickinson will stay open if this happens. He says that Troy wholeheartedly welcomes this feasibility study and looks forward to welcoming what might come of it for our two school districts. The long standing, positive relationship and partnership with Wynantskill has gone back to when he was Troy High School principal, and even well before that. Just this year, we approved a merger allowing Gardner Dickinson students to participate in sports at the modified level this school year for Troy Middle School, as well as providing them the opportunity to participate in Ski Club and the middle school musical. We are excited about sharing these opportunities with the Gardner Dickinson students. Mr. Carmello continues that after he reviewed the optimization study, it is clear from the report and the extensive work that was completed that all stakeholder groups in Wynantskill want the same thing; the school and building to remain intact for there to be expanded opportunities for students academically, athletically and with extracurricular activities. He is confident that the feasibility study will show without question, that a complete partnership with the two districts is how we get that done. Over the last 14 years, Troy has had two valedictorians, four salutatorians, and six students ranked number three - all from Gardner Dickinson. During that timeframe, Gardner Dickinson students who have attended Troy High earned over 3,000 college credits through Troy's extensive college in the high school program, averaging over 200 college credits per year. Last year's total graduates earned over 2,000 college credits from Troy High, and the graduating class earned over \$300,000 in scholarships and awards. But the most compelling argument for this partnership going forward, as Mr. Elliott mentioned, is the financial incentive aid from New York State. By combining both districts together, we receive over \$241 million over the next 14 years, which is game changing money that will allow us to do so many outstanding things for the students and communities of both districts. Specifically for Gardner Dickinson, that amount of money will guarantee that we keep the building open, not only to keep it open but allow us to expand and improve upon the already comprehensive academic, social, emotional and athletic programs we have from PreK to Grade 12. It's money that will expand our after school offerings, especially at the elementary levels, in addition to our academic programs every school offers flag football, basketball, lacrosse, field hockey and karate at our elementary schools every day. Gardner Dickinson will be able to have a similar schedule with those kinds of afterschool programs at their school. The money will maintain the already low class sizes that we enjoy in the Troy school district. In addition to the \$241 million, our building aid ration will increase to 98%. Troy's current building aid ratio is 90%, that means every dollar we spend on a capital project here in Troy, we receive \$0.90 back from the state. That's why Troy has been able to do so many projects, such as the current tech wing construction, renovating the middle school, School 16 and School 18. The new technology wing at Troy High School is set to be completed by the fall of 2027 and we have been able to do all of these projects without any impact to our taxpayers. A reorganization would put our building aid ratio at 98%, which you can figure out how it becomes even better if this happens, then for every dollar spent including remodeling, renovating, and upgrading Gardner Dickinson building itself we will get back \$0.98 in state aid. We pay just \$0.02 for every dollar spent. This money would not only be able to keep the building open, we can do a capital project there and make it a state of the art, 21st century building with everything the staff and students need for an optimal learning environment and a safe and secure facility, with no impact to taxpayers. So again, if the Gardner Dickinson community wants the school to stay open and stay intact and get even better - this is how that happens through the Troy and Wynantskill partnership after this study is complete. Thank you all for being here this evening. We look forward to all the town halls and all the committee and stakeholder meetings that we'll have, and that will be scheduled to

look forward to answering any questions and addressing any concerns at that time. He concludes by stating this partnership is a game changer for the Troy and Wynantskill School District, and we certainly welcome this study and the process that will follow. Thank you, and now I turn the discussion over to Wynantskill Superintendent Mary Yodis.

Wynantskill Superintendent, Mary Yodis follows Mr. Carmello by thanking those who joined tonight's meeting and contributed to this important discussion. First, Dr. Yodis expresses her deep appreciation to the Troy City School District Board of Education for hosting tonight's meeting and immediately welcoming our district with such an open mind, and such positive future partnership discussions. To Superintendent Mr. Carmello, she thanks for his continued partnership and commitment to the Gardner Dickinson students. She goes on to explain that she has had the pleasure of working with him for the last decade and he has always provided countless opportunities and unwavering support to the Wynantskill students. Dr. Yodis also thanks David Elliott for lending his expertise and perspective to tonight's meeting and answering the many questions over the past several weeks. She also thanked Dr. Cruz and Mr. Hadjioannou for their steady leadership, guidance and support provided throughout her 13 years. Dr. Yodis also expresses gratitude to the Schmidt Leadership Group who have spent countless hours and days on site at Wynantskill for the last six months. She explains that this group was chosen to do the optimization study because their group is over 4.5 hours away, with no knowledge of Wynantskill or Rensselaer County and was able to provide a fresh perspective. Sometimes the feedback was difficult to hear, but the honest conversations were extremely helpful to understand that now indeed is the right time to consider change. The Schmidt group reinforced the truth that we already knew that our community deeply, deeply loves our school district and wants to remain open. This is prevalent through all meetings, all focus groups and all the surveys. But everyone also recognizes that in order to do so, we need additional support. We believe that the programmatic and financial support from the Troy City School District, coupled with the \$241 million from New York State, will ensure that Gardner Dickinson remains open for many, many years to come. Most importantly, I want to thank the students, family and faculty, the staff and the residents who engaged so thoughtfully in this process of these conversations. Your feedback has shaped every step of this journey. Tonight's conversation is not an ending, but a beginning. There will be many opportunities for the entire community to participate, whether by joining committees, attending forums, sharing your thoughts and questions through community discussions. As Mr. Elliott said, this is a community vote. We are giving it to the community to vote on taking advantage of that reorganization, money and benefits. It's all about the community. Questar III BOCES developed a shared website that will hold all the updates and resources during this entire process. Pending the outcome of this meeting, the website will be live tomorrow at www.questar.org/feasibility. Provided to those in attendance tonight is a schedule of several community conversations to be held on September 8th and September 9th. Dr. Yodis closes by saying that the future of our school belongs to all of us. Together, we will explore every single possibility and ensure that our students have the best opportunities for success. Thank you again for being here tonight.

B. Public Input on agenda and non-agenda items non-action items

Wynantskill residents addressed questions and concerns to the Wynantskill Board. There were no public comments from Troy residents.

III. Action Items

Mrs. Pompey-Conway made a motion to approve Item 1 as listed.

Second: Mrs. Heckman

Discussion: None

Carried: 8-0

A. Feasibility Study

WHEREAS, the Board of Education of Enlarged City School District of Troy (the "Board") is committed to exploring all avenues that may improve the educational opportunities and outcomes for the students of the district; and

WHEREAS, the Board recognizes the potential benefits of reorganization with another school district, including but not limited to enhanced academic programs, increased extracurricular opportunities, and potential cost savings; and

WHEREAS, the Superintendent of Schools has recommended that the Board fully explore the feasibility of reorganization with the Wynantskill Union Free School District; and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interest of the Troy community to fully understand the potential impacts, both positive and negative, of reorganization;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE RESOLVED that the Board of Education of the Enlarged City School District of Troy hereby authorizes the Superintendent of Schools to pursue a comprehensive reorganization feasibility study to be undertaken jointly with the Wynantskill Union Free School District, including but not limited to the engagement of appropriate consultants, the collection and analysis of relevant data, and collaboration with stakeholders from both districts.

The Wynantskill Union Free School District made a motion to approve their feasibility study resolution, which was passed unanimously.

B. Adjourn

At 8:05pm, Mrs. Pompey-Conway made a motion to adjourn the public session. This was seconded by Mrs. Heckman and carried 8-0.

The Wynantskill Union Free School District made a motion to adjourn the public session, which was passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,



Theresa Kaniff
District Clerk