

## **GLENS FALLS CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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### **Board adopts resolution to reconfigure elementary schools to K-4, move fifth-graders to Middle School, close Sanford Street building**

March 21, 2011—The Glens Falls Board of Education adopted a resolution tonight to reconfigure its elementary program into three kindergarten through fourth-grade buildings, placing fifth grade in a self-contained area at Glens Falls Middle School and closing the Sanford Street elementary school building. These changes will go into effect for the beginning of the 2011-12 school year.

“Closing an elementary school is an extremely difficult and emotional decision for any board to make,” said Board President Dr. Anna Poulos. “But we’re faced with a general enrollment decline that we don’t see improving over the next few years—certainly not to the extent of gaining more than 600 students, which is what we’ve lost district-wide over the past 16 years.”

The enrollment decline, coupled with serious financial challenges caused by decreasing state aid and a weak economy, led the board to establish an ad hoc committee of residents, staff, parents and district leaders to study the feasibility of closing an elementary school building. The group, known as the Elementary Building Study Committee, took five months to consider the overall delivery of the district’s elementary education program, and its sub-committees studied building capacities, new configuration options and building elimination factors.

The school board made its decision after considering a variety of information, including the Elementary Building Study Committee report, enrollment history and projections, the community’s educational priorities, community members’ thoughts on the issue, and the ongoing fiscal health of the district.

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In considering which of the four elementary buildings would close under a K-4 reorganization, district leaders considered many factors. The following priorities emerged in the decision-making process:

- maintaining geographically similar sizes in the three new attendance zones;
- disrupting only one group of students with a building change, rather than re-assigning students in every building;
- maintaining the neighborhood school concept as best as possible; and
- keeping students within one mile of their school building.

“Board members have been steeped in the committee’s analysis for several weeks,” said Dr. Poulos, “and we also gained significant public input from our community forums. We felt we had the necessary information to weigh the decision and needed to come to a resolution now so that budget development can continue and planning can begin for next year’s transition.”

The building closure will save an estimated \$403,000 annually at a time when the district is faced with rising operating costs and a significant gap between expenses and revenues. The Board of Education is considering additional cuts to close a \$1.27 million budget shortfall for 2011-12.

Over the next several months, the school board will decide on the future of the Sanford Street building. Some of the options for the building include renting it to outside organizations or selling it, as was done with the Broad Street school building in 1981 and the old junior/senior high school building that is now the Heritage Apartments.

### **New configuration**

Under the new configuration, all fifth-graders will attend the middle school beginning this fall. They will attend classes in the traditional elementary format—separate from other middle school grades. District officials are exploring different start times and entry doors for fifth graders as well.

“Housing the fifth grade in the middle school building gives us the potential for broader programmatic improvements,” said Superintendent Thomas McGowan. “The grade level alignment will allow for more equalized class sizes,” McGowan continued. “We can enhance our curriculum to spiral from fifth through eighth grade. Teachers could collaborate in ways they couldn’t before, and the program can be better tailored to students’ needs through ability grouping. We also have the space in the Middle School that would otherwise go under-utilized.”

Students in grades K-4 currently attending Sanford Street Elementary will attend Kensington Road, Jackson Heights or Big Cross Street elementary schools in the fall. The new building assignments will be made as quickly as possible, and families will be notified of their assignment. Students currently attending Kensington Road, Jackson Heights and Big Cross Street elementary schools will not see any change in assignment.

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Once district officials determine the building assignments for K-4 students, they will then assign buildings and classes for the Universal Pre-Kindergarten program.

### **Planning for the transition**

The district will seek feedback from parents, teachers and administrators in the near future to help ensure a smooth transition that meets students' academic, social and emotional needs. Questions and concerns raised during the community forums regarding the transition process for elementary students will also be addressed.

The district is inviting all interested parents and community residents to participate in one of the committees focused on the transition process. Administrators and parent-teacher organizations will also work together to develop activities such as building tours and get-togethers that can help make the transition experience as positive as possible for students and their families.

To join the parent transition committee, contact Amy Towers at phone 792-1212 or by email at [atowers@gfsd.org](mailto:atowers@gfsd.org).

“While it’s painful to see a school so treasured by our community close, I have no doubt that we’ll be able to come together as a unified community to make this a positive transition for all of our students,” said Mr. McGowan. “As so many people said in our community forums, Glens Falls has a tradition of excellence in our schools. And that certainly won’t change.”

More information related to the elementary school closure and new configuration can be found online at [www.gfsd.org](http://www.gfsd.org).

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