

**Feasibility Study Committee**  
**Meeting #2 Notes – May 15, 2017**  
**22 Committee members; 7 Observers**

1. At 5:15pm, the assembled group of committee members and observers boarded a bus to travel to the Panama Central School District's athletic fields to view the football field, surrounded by an all-weather track and stands for game attendees. Traveling a very short distance from there are the practice field for football and baseball, and the softball and baseball fields. There is also a cross country trail in that general area. The athletic complex poses two problems, in that there is no concession stand at the baseball fields (there is one at the football field), nor are there restrooms (inside facilities) near the baseball fields.
2. From there, we returned to the school and entered the building at the entrance used for the natatorium where there is a competition-size swimming pool and seating for 276 people. The pool is used in the mornings for senior citizens' swim, and in the evenings for community swim. It can be rented for pool parties, but all other uses are free to the public. The addition for this area was completed in 2010, and also contains a weight room and a jump room, plus four classrooms that have moveable "walls" to create two large instructional spaces, making them adaptable to meet today's learning needs.
3. The school has had 11 additions since its construction in 1953. It now has 228,299 square feet. Elementary classrooms range in size from 660 to 800 square feet, depending on when they were constructed. (State regulations have changed over the years.)
4. In 2000-2001, the auditorium was added, holding 666 people. It has a sound room at the back, and the band practice room connects to it, so the band can frequently practice on the stage. Mr. Walter pointed out the sound baffles on the walls to improve acoustics in the auditorium. Mr. Lictus said that the aud. is used relatively often by various school programs and outside groups.
5. The group responded to Tom's question about the positives of the Panama building as follows: Pool, auditorium, two large gyms, well-maintained building. The negatives: Distance to the ball fields; lack of restrooms for baseball fields; many additions to the building.
6. Marilyn reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the FSC members, stressing the importance of allowing the data to drive decisions, and not arriving at meetings with pre-formed judgments without first knowing the facts. She also reviewed ground rules, which seem to be followed at this time.
7. Tom asked the committee members to summarize the focus group feedback from the 8 groups interviewed so far.
  - a. Each group had similar concerns: concerns about building utilization in a merged district; sports teams being too large (in basketball, volleyball, for example) to allow the less capable students to participate; that people felt not well-informed about the district's programs and budgets; that there would be a loss of "community"; that student-teacher relationships would not be the same; that the school is the center of the town and the community would not be able to continue as usual without it.

- b. They also noted that students and parents want more program opportunities; students like the shared athletic teams.
8. Marilyn responded to two questions from the first meeting. Both Clymer (9) and Panama (10) allow the out-of-district children of staff and faculty to attend the school the parent works for. Clymer charges a very minor tuition amount for 4 students, while Panama charges \$1,700 for one tuition student. Each district has 4 special education students for whom tuition must be paid who attend the other district, thus creating a net cost of \$0 for each district.
  9. Tom reviewed the enrollment projection method, using handouts that detailed each district's live births and kindergarten enrollment; each district's enrollment history from 2012-13 – 2016-17; and each district's enrollment projections. In summary, Tom said that the enrollments in Clymer will drop very modestly and then rise again to level out in a few years. Panama has lost many students since 2000, but is expected to level out in two years. The projection for a combined district of about 900 students is consistent with these trends.
  10. Dave discussed the positions that the two districts share: Superintendent, Director of Curriculum and Instruction; Technology Director; Typist, School Psychologist; Business Official (part of the year). He showed how each district paid the other for the positions, beginning in 2013-14 up to this year, thus resulting in equal costs considering the amount of time each position is shared.
  11. He then went on to discuss the fine that was assessed against Panama CSD in 2013-14 for late filing of a capital project report in December 2012 (2012-13 school year). There are currently four other districts in NYS that have been assessed similar fines (North Rockland, Fort Edward, Liverpool, New Hartford). In the 2013-14 State Budget, a plan was approved to allow a 10 year repayment plan. Also provided in the State budget was a \$500,000 Supplemental Valuation Impact Grant through the Education Department/Aid to Localities budget bill, which was provided for in the 2014-15 State Budget, the 2015-16 State Budget, and the 2016-17 State Budget. A bill to forgive the remaining amount in one lump sum was not signed by the Governor. For 2017-18, Panama will receive another \$500,000, thus reducing the penalty to about \$2,400,000 at the end of the 2017-18 school year. There are at least 4 different possibilities to eliminate that fine: 1) Continue the yearly requests to Senator Young to provide the \$500,000 payments to the school district even as a merged district; 2) Determine if a merger would cancel the fine since the fine is not considered a long-term debt; 3) Use Panama's remaining fund balance to offset the fine if a merger is approved; 4) Use incentive aid from NYS to repay the remaining fine. None of the above would affect taxes. Clarification point: Payment of the fine has not affected Panama's school taxes over the last five years. It is not a line item in the budget. None of the above solutions would affect Clymer's taxes should there be a merger.
  12. Incentive Aid: There are two forms of this aid – operating aid (for programming and/or taxes) and building aid for capital projects, ranging from maintenance and repairs to buildings, to additions to buildings, to construction of new buildings. The total amount of incentive aid, spread over 14 years, is \$16,455,098.

Dave reviewed the details of how local property values affect state aid to schools, as well as how the number of pupils at the secondary level (weighted at 1.25%) and elementary pupils (weighted at 1.00%) also affect the amount of aid to school districts. Clymer has higher property values than Panama does, resulting in less state aid for Clymer since it is considered wealthier in terms of property. A merger would bring more debt service aid to help pay Clymer's debt for capital expenses since currently they are paying 16 cents on the dollar, and Panama is paying 14 cents on the dollar. For the remaining debt held by the two districts, Clymer would get the benefit of Panama's higher aid ratio, thus generating \$175,000 more aid for the debt. In a merged district, the amount to be paid would be 5 cents on the dollar for any NEW projects.

13. Marilyn asked committee members to review the information sheets about the amount of time students and teachers in each district spend in school. For students, Clymer students spend 9 minutes more per day in school, and Clymer teachers spend 19 minutes more. The elementary and high school students in each districts spend the same amount of time in school. Both school districts have Pre-K – 6 and 7-12 grade configurations. Each elementary school has very similar elementary class sizes, with a range of 13 – 19 in Clymer and 13 – 20 in Panama. The textbook series used in both districts are almost identical. Last year, elementary teachers from both districts worked together to select a new math series, which is in place as of this year (Go Math). All of these similarities in both districts would make a merger much easier programmatically.
14. Both districts offer virtually the same junior high school program, with two exceptions. There is no home and careers one-semester course for 7<sup>th</sup> graders in Panama, nor is there an agri-tech course there. Class sizes for core courses range from 5(just one) – 22 in Clymer, and from 15 – 20 in Panama, not including the AIS and Direct Instruction classes offered for struggling students, both of which are much smaller.
15. The high school programs' greatest difference is the number of programs offered as electives in Clymer. There are no board-imposed limits on class sizes in Clymer, so if only one student wants an elective, the administration and faculty try to provide that course. In addition, in Clymer there are 10 class periods per day (38 minutes each), and this fact allows time for students to take more electives. In Panama, there are 8 periods lasting 43 minutes each, so there are fewer class periods for extra electives. The total number of electives offered from both districts is 69, with 55 being offered in Clymer and 31 in Panama.
16. There are 14 JCC classes offered in Clymer, and 9 in Panama, with a total of 13 sections there. There are three distance learning courses offered (2 in U.S. History, both emanating from Panama, and 1 in music theory taken by 2 Clymer students). Clymer students take advantage of all three, and Panama students only take the history courses.
17. Committee members then broke into five groups to respond to this question: How could educational opportunities be enhanced or sustained in a merged Clymer-Panama School District? All responses follow.

#### **Group 1**

- More elective courses by combining what both districts already offer

- Creating new electives/opportunities by utilizing additional state aid
- Sustaining existing programs (not have to make further cuts)
- Sustaining college-credit courses
- Offering honors courses throughout high school, starting in 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- Reinstating programs that have been cut

#### **Group 2**

- Scheduling flexibility
- Variety in teacher style/approach/strengths
- Curriculum/more offerings
- More reserves
- Benefit students – collaboration, different points of view

#### **Group 3**

- Bring back AP classes (to augment programs for college-bound students to assure the transfer of college credit)
- Have larger class sizes for wider discussions and more interaction for students
- Bring back business and ag-tech programs to Panama, and ensure their survival in Clymer
- Could offer more distance learning classes
- Could offer another language other than English (French, German, Latin, Chinese, Russian, etc.)
- Offer more computer science, digital art, information technology, criminal science, forensics, etc. Offer more
- Bring vocational technical programs back to the school instead of sending students to BOCES
- Provide more teaching depth with the advantage of more teachers

#### **Group 4**

- The challenge will be higher within a class to do better and be the best
- Increases in State reimbursements (aid) could assist in updating educational materials.
- Keeping technology up-to-date in all areas
- Funds to upgrade the music departments; combining things we already have (such as computers)
- Bring back drivers' education
- Shared staff expertise

#### **Group 5**

- Enhanced curriculum with an honors track to help expand educational/college success
- Students without interest in college need vocational opportunities/provide choices for students without academic interests
- Vocational/technical could help students learn the trades
- Add more art and music options
- More diverse educational opportunities could be offered than just the basics or norm
- Address special needs students with courses that include budgeting, doing laundry, using a checkbook, cooking

- Develop identity and sense of community in a combined district – pride of tradition
- Time being transported needs to be filled with access for higher speed internet for better time use. (Students could be learning.)
- Curriculum needs to benefit ALL students

**Priorities:**

- Increase the JCC program and add back AP classes. (2)
  - More DL classes
  - Offer more electives, such as another Language Other Than English (LOTE) and Forensics
  - Provide more teaching depth when teachers are combined
  - More competition in classes
  - Obtain better educational materials with increased state aid
  - Funds to upgrade by combining what we have in both districts
  - Bring back drivers' education as an elective
  - Have more AP and honors classes
  - Provide additional opportunities in vocational education
  - Expand on electives (art, music, life skills)
  - Develop classes or curriculum to develop community service
  - Provide more college credit courses
  - Reinstate programs that were cut
  - Create new electives with new state aid
  - Combine what each district offers to expand electives
  - Allow scheduling flexibility
  - Offer different styles of teaching – greater variety
  - Have scheduling flexibility
  - Larger number of students in class would allow greater collaboration and more depth in discussions.
- 18.** Tom's presentation about the technology used in each district was postponed to Meeting #3 on May 31.
- 19.** The communications plan remains as it was after the last meeting.