

BOARD OF EDUCATION  
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Superintendent

Donna C. Snyder  
Business Administrator/  
Board Secretary

Jeff Waldron, Principal  
Newton High School

Kristi Greene, Principal  
Halsted Middle School

Kevin Stanton, Principal  
Merriam Avenue School



# THE BRAVE NEWS

*the Newton Public Schools Quarterly Newsletter*

September 2017

## VOTE ON SEPTEMBER 26TH Referendum to expand Merriam Avenue School

The Newton Board of Education is seeking voter approval to undertake a renovation and expansion project at Merriam Avenue School entailing the construction of various new instructional spaces, existing facilities renovations, and site improvements. Such project is necessary in connection with the planned closure of Halsted Middle School, as approved by the New Jersey Department of Education, and the related reconfiguration of Merriam Avenue School into a grades pK-8 school.

**Please vote! Your voice needs to be heard.**

### PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

The construction involves a two-story addition to include the following classrooms: 5 for kindergarten (to allow preschool expansion); 16 for general education; 6 for special education; 2 for modern science labs; 4 for small group instruction; 1 for visual art; and 1 for vocal music. Ancillary spaces include: rest rooms; storage rooms; mechanical rooms; stairs and corridors; community schools space; and 2 additional parking lots with Gardner Avenue access. Renovations to existing spaces to create the following classrooms include: 2 for small group instruction; 1 for Spanish language; 1 for instrumental music with practice room and storage area; 1 for physical education fitness; plus larger main office area, nurses' suites, and child study team offices.

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 1. Why close Halsted?

- The Board of Education had a full professional assessment of the district's facilities done in 2011, and a more targeted analysis with public input in 2015. Many facility inadequacies were identified at Halsted including regular classrooms, specialized rooms for arts and sciences, core spaces such as gymnasium and cafeteria, mechanical fixtures, and disability access among others.
- The cost to provide sufficient space and bring the school up to code (which is a necessary part of most renovations) is over \$17 million, for which there is no money available in our regular operating budget. Even this would not address all issues with the site such as infrastructure, traffic, parking, outdoor space, and community space.
- The Board of Education has determined that fixing and upgrading Halsted is not cost effective when compared to the proposed plan. The State has authorized the closing of the building. However, the building and property have value to investors for other purposes that would benefit the community and could be added to the tax rolls.

#### 2. Why expand at Merriam?

- The Board of Education studied the potential for a new middle school on the West End Avenue property adjacent to the high school. The cost was well over the district's debt capacity.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## DISTRICT NEWS

### ★ ATTENTION PARENTS/GUARDIANS ★

Please be sure your contact information is up to date in the **PARENT PORTAL**.  
If you need assistance please contact your child's school.



#### NEWTON HIGH SCHOOL ROBOTICS TEAM APERTURE HOSTS SENATOR CORY BOOKER AT NJ STATE FAIR

Senator Cory Booker was a welcome guest of the Newton High School FIRST Robotics Team Aperture in August at the NJ State Fair/Sussex County Fair Grounds. Senator Booker discussed the Newton Robotics program and the success at the 2017 FIRST Championship, where the team won the Underwriter's Laboratory Industrial Safety Award. He also spoke to Ed Petersen, Picatinny Arsenal Program Manager of STEM Education, about the STEM initiatives at Newton High School and the arsenal. Team Aperture is closely connected to Picatinny Arsenal's STEM program, of which Senator Booker spoke very highly in a letter written to the Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army and read into the record of the U.S. Senate.

## Welcome

### New staff 2017-18

#### NEWTON HIGH SCHOOL

Samantha Castro	Assistant Principal
Adam Good	Music Teacher
Meg Gray-Revoredo	Spanish Teacher
Erin Marmara	Librarian/Media Specialist
Keith Meyer	Art Teacher
Matthew Popek	Security Monitor
Rozaliya Seryapov	Biology Teacher

#### HALSTED MIDDLE SCHOOL

Daniel Storey	Security Monitor
Arielle Weinstein	Special Education Teacher

#### MERRIAM AVENUE SCHOOL

Kim DeJesus	Lunchroom Aide
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#### DISTRICT

Mariu Morton-Comer	ESL Teacher
Mark Newman	School Psychologist

### DISTRICT GOALS 2017-18

District goals and action plans for the 2017-18 school year were adopted by the Board of Education at their public meeting on August 22, 2017. The goals reflect the values outlined in the district's recently revised mission statement.

1. Develop curriculum and provide professional development that strengthens student-centered learning to increase student achievement.
  - a. Complete Phase 1 (board-approved curriculum) and Phase 2 (materials & resources, modifications for at-risk populations, benchmark assessments) of District Curriculum Plan.
  - b. Provide staff with professional development opportunities on student-centered learning such as book discussion, PLC meeting time, online and in-house PD resources, access to external PD resources, etc.
  - c. Create pK-12 Mathematics Committee to develop common transitions, data management, student identification, process, interventions, and connections.
  - d. Pursue Future Ready NJ Certification to promote the skills, abilities, and capacities essential for success in college, career, and citizenship in a digital age. *(Continued on page 4)*

### NEWTON SCHOOLS EARN CERTIFICATION FROM SUSTAINABLE JERSEY

Merriam Avenue School, Halsted Middle School, and Newton High School have each earned certification from the state's Sustainable Jersey for Schools program. Each school was required to create a "green team" that planned and documented completion of activities to earn bronze level certification.



## Why expand at Merriam?

*continued from page 1*

- The entire current middle school program can be offered with room for pK-8 growth. Middle level academic classes can operate on a separate floor from elementary classrooms.
- Expansion will provide increased academic opportunities, improved scheduling, better equipped classrooms, and larger core spaces (gym, cafeteria, library).
- Community space allows current and future health and social services to be housed directly in the school. More on-site parking allows better public access for events.
- A compact design minimizes the overall costs and facilitates student movement. School consolidation offers opportunities for operational cost savings.

### PROJECT FINANCIALS

Total Project Cost:	\$18,950,001
Capital Reserve Fund:	\$256,326
New Long Term Bonds:	\$18,693,675
State Debt Service Aid:	\$3,095,578
Local Debt Service Cost:	\$15,598,097

#### Net Taxpayer Cost:

\$181 per \$100,000 assessed property value  
\$337 on average assessed property of \$185,938

## REFERENDUM DETAILS

Date: Tuesday, September 26, 2017  
Time: 7:00 am - 8:00 pm

### POLLING LOCATIONS:

First United Methodist Church, 111 Ryerson Ave  
First Aid & Rescue Squad, 68 Sussex St  
Municipal Building, 39 Trinity St  
Firehouse #1, 22 Mill St

#### 4. What has the school district done to provide tax relief?

- The school district tax levy was reduced for 2017-18, the second such reduction since 2012.
- The Board of Education returned \$221,748 in additional state aid to Newton taxpayers in July 2017 as a small but significant first step toward the equitable distribution of state aid to schools. Fair funding would provide significant relief to every taxpayer. The Board and Administration have been statewide leaders in advocating for local tax fairness and will continue to do so.
- The Board of Education refinanced its existing facility bonds to provide \$1.1 million in direct savings to taxpayers.
- The school district changed health insurance carriers for \$300,000+ in reduced premium costs.
- Staff positions are managed efficiently. For this coming school year there are no new positions despite continued growth in student enrollment; 8 teacher assistant positions have been reduced.

#### 3. What are the school district's enrollment projections?

- Since 2010, school enrollment has increased in Newton, though it has continued to decline in all other Sussex County districts. Our current Grade K-8 enrollment has an average of 86 students per grade level. The school consolidation plan meets current classroom needs with room for growth up to 105-115 students per grade level.
- A recently performed demographic study predicts a steady enrollment increase through 2022 (2.85%). This projection reflects the Millennial Generation's preference for housing in established town centers such as Newton.
- The school district also continues to expand access to preschool for 3- and 4-year olds, a proven strategy to increase literacy proficiency and save money on costs for academic intervention.

#### 5. What impact would school consolidation have on staffing levels?

- Our schools are currently understaffed. The 2016-17 school district operating budget was nearly \$500,000 below what the State considers to be adequate, the only such district in Sussex County.
- Staffing questions often start with leadership. Our administrator to student ratio is the 15th lowest among New Jersey's 49 small pK-12 districts.
- Demographic projections show an increase in student enrollment between now and 2022, so staffing levels may need to increase slightly over time.
- The most effective methods to get tax relief are: (1) continuing to advocate for Newton's fair share of state aid to schools; and (2) reversing the decade-long decline in the Town's property rateables.

#### 6. What happens if the referendum does not pass?

- Halsted will have to be maintained. The Board does not believe this is a cost effective solution, especially given that the State has authorized the closing of the building. Eventually, it will need to be replaced.

*(Continued on page 4)*

What happens if the referendum does not pass *continued from page 3*

- The school district does not have the money to fix Halsted. Renovations and maintenance would need to be added to the operating budget by raising taxes and/or reducing student programs.
- The site has limitations which cannot be corrected. Old infrastructure, limited parking, traffic issues, and lack of green fields and community spaces will continue to be problems.
- A future referendum will likely be more costly. Bond rates are at historic lows, construction costs tend to rise, and the State has approved funds to subsidize the project now. These conditions are not guaranteed in the coming years.



**DISTRICT GOALS 2017-18**

(continued from page 2)

2. Implement a Newton-specific model for community schools to increase student achievement.
  - a. Engage district-level design team and deepen community partnerships.
  - b. Build out school-level plans with key staff to include activities, spaces, schedules, etc.
  - c. Apply for grants related to community schools (e.g., 21st CCLC).
3. Pursue school facilities improvements to increase student achievement.
  - a. Distribute project information, encourage voting, and hold referendum vote.
  - b. Build upon referendum outcome.
4. Persist in advocating for school funding equity to increase student achievement.
  - a. Meet with key legislative leaders to outline next steps.
  - b. Engage stakeholders to advocate next steps with state leaders after election.
  - c. Build next steps into a sustainable path for state budget and SFRA revision.

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