

Sea Isle Wants Residents to Weigh In *Should School Close or Forge Ahead?*

By JOE HART

SEA ISLE CITY — The board of education here is planning two community workshop meetings in April to try to determine what to do with its ailing school district.

A press release announcing the meetings asked, "What should happen to our school district?"

The release offers four

possibilities for the residents to consider:

- Business as usual with pre-kindergarten to eighth grade remaining at the Sea Isle School and continue sending students to Ocean City for high school.

- Enter into a pre-k to eighth grade arrangement with another district and continue sending students to Ocean City for high school.

- Enter into a pre-k to 12th grade relationship with another neighboring community, if so which one?

- Enter into a pre-k to 12th grade relationship with Ocean City School District.

Educational Information and Resource Center (ERIC) conducted a feasibility study for the district and presented it to the board at

a March 15 meeting.

EIRC is a public agency specializing in education-related programs and services for parents, schools, communities, nonprofit organizations and privately held businesses throughout New Jersey, according to information on the organization's Web site.

Due to the increase in property values and decrease in the childbearing population, the study found that the district's enrollment will continue to decline.

In 1990, there were 148 pre-school age children and 735 young adults in the city compared to 94 children and 529 childbearing adults in 2000, according to census numbers.

Those trends will continue down, according to the study.

ERIC consultants found it evident that Sea Isle would benefit financially by entering a complete pre-k to 12th grade relationship with another district.

For the average assessed value of a property in the city of \$564,516, the study showed the cost for each of a few different options along with the per pupil cost of education.

For keeping the status quo, it was \$666 for the

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School Close

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average home or \$39,160 per pupil.

To send all students to Ocean City was \$485 or \$29,425 per pupil.

For all students to attend Middle Township schools it would cost \$299 for the average home or \$19,615 per pupil.

To send pre-k to eighth grade to Dennis Township schools and ninth to 12th grade to Middle Township was \$378 or \$20,164 per pupil.

If finances alone were the determining factor, ERIC consultants said that Middle Township would be the place to send Sea Isle's pupils.

Because of the long-standing relationship with Ocean City, however, the ERIC study suggested the district continue with the status quo or move to a full sending relationship with Ocean City School District.

One drawback for the board to a total sending relationship with the city's northerly neighbor would be the lack of control over the programs and direction of its students.

Sea Isle would not have a member on the Ocean City board of education because it wouldn't account for 10 percent of the school's enrollment.

The study mentioned the state's effort to reform property taxes and school funding as a reason to keep things "as is" until any changes take effect, but suggested it set a level at which the tax rate and cost per pupil become too much for the district to handle.

The consultants also mentioned that the school building was in need of extensive

repairs, around \$2.2 million over the next five years.

The community meetings will be held at the Sea Isle City Public School, 4501 Park Road, on April 16 and 23 at 7 p.m.

ERIC Executive Director Charles Ivory will be facilitating the workshop meetings.

"From my experience, meetings like these are very helpful for local boards of education to make difficult decisions," Ivory said. "We will break up into small groups of people with varying points of view, such as parents, teachers and taxpayers to discuss the different options before the board."

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