

# Buildings shrink: Fewer students, smaller building

grade, third and fourth grade and fifth and sixth. Seventh and eighth grade would be separate.

Eighth grade has the largest anticipated enrollment next year, with a projected 13 resident students. Each of the other grades have projected enrollments of less than 10 students, with the lowest for next year being sixth grade, with four students.

Anticipated staffing for next year includes 12 full-time positions, including 11 teachers and a combined school nurse/health teacher. Also anticipated are the equivalent of three full-time special area teachers (covering physical education, art, music, Spanish and technology), three teaching aides and four special education aides.

That brings the average to more than one full-time staff member for every four students, including projected tuition students. Administrative positions would bring that average even lower.

## Building shrinks

The school building itself will be shrinking in square footage, according to Benedetto's plan.

Benedetto said he is advising that the school board approve closing of what he calls "Annex One," which includes a teacher's room, child study team rooms, special education classroom, speech and guidance.

Benedetto said closing that area is necessary because of the poor structural condition of the building. He said external areas of the annex can be seen to be rotting and he anticipates similar problems could exist on the interior of the building.

Water stains mark carpeting and ceiling tiles throughout that area of the building. Benedetto said although no testing has been done on the interior of the building, it is likely that conditions on the outside of the building extend to the inside.

## Feasibility study on future of district coming in March, too late for budget

By MARY RUDLOFF  
Ocean City Sentinel

SEA ISLE CITY - It won't be in time to help with the budgeting process for next year, but the Sea Isle City school board will have results from the feasibility study by late March.

According to Dr. Charles Ivory, the head of the Educational Information Resource Center (EIRC), some of the results will be presented to the school board, as agreed, at one of the board's March meetings.

The feasibility study was requested by the board but is being paid for by the municipal government, as part of the city's Master Plan update. The study looks at the future of the school district, its potential for future operation, enrollment projections and options for educating the town's children.

The study is being done by EIRC, the firm also hired by the school board last June to provide the services of a chief school administrator, business administrator and child study team head. The school board also hired EIRC earlier this school year to do upgrades to the school's technology and website.

When originally presented in August 2006, Ivory said the study would include a minimum of four community meetings, and results would be available in April. In negotiations, however, the deadline was moved to late March.

Last month, several school board members had requested the results earlier, if possible,

to aid in the development of the 2007-08 budget. Ivory said he could not promise results any earlier than March, but that they would be provided to the school board earlier if they were complete.

The four community meetings have not taken place. Ivory said that component will come after the presentation of the study's findings. The purpose of those meetings, he explained, was to make the public at large familiar with the results of the study, explain all of the options and answer any questions.

In the end, however, Ivory said, it is the school board and not the public that has the duty to decide the school district's future.

"We want the people to be familiar with the information, all of the information, so that when the board makes a decision they know that it is an informed decision and the reasons behind it," he said.

The school board is now in the early stages of developing next year's school budget. Board members face declining enrollment, tighter restraints on administrative spending and at least part of the building deteriorating to the point where the chief school administrator is recommending shutting the annex down.

Possible options to be presented include combining with another school district, sending students to another district (most likely Ocean City where Sea Isle sends its high school students), continuing at the present level of operation or applying to become a magnet or charter school.

In addition to structural issues, Benedetto said, the school district would realize financial savings by closing Annex One. He said all utilities, including heat, air conditioning and electric, would be turned off.

Some electrical would have to remain turned on, however, because of requirements tied to the fire alarm system.

By turning off the heat and air conditioning, Benedetto acknowledged the interior condition of that section of the building would likely deteriorate further. He said the current or future school board would have to take action at some point to disassemble and remove the

Annex One portion of the building. He said it is beyond what he would consider repairable.

An area Benedetto referred to as "Annex Two" would remain in use. That four-room corridor that uses the same access entryway from the main part of the school building as Annex One, is earmarked as a teacher's room, guidance, conference room and the child study team office. Benedetto said the heating and other utilities systems are separate for Annexes One and Two.

Heading into the school budget season of February and March, Benedetto did not offer any estimates regarding savings realized by either the combining of classes or the closing of Annex One.

As preliminary budget figures have not been presented,

close to the current year's, which was in the \$40,000 per child range, Vasallo is anticipating administrative costs being based on the regional average again. In the current school year, he said, Sea Isle is budgeted to the very last penny in that area. Even so, the district only made it within the state limits by spreading out the salaries, and accompanying duties, of Vasallo, Benedetto and several others who fall in the administrative job description.

Vasallo and Benedetto are employees of the Educational Information Resource Center (EIRC), the outside group hired by the school board to run the district. In the contracts with EIRC, Vasallo is the school business administrator but also takes on duties of transportation coordinator