

# Forum on Sea Isle school: Part II

## Question remains: Keep school or ship out students

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SEA ISLE CITY - The second community meeting on the future of the Sea Isle City school matched the first in more ways than one.

The second meeting, held Monday, April 23, gave community members, teachers and board members another chance to have input on whether the tiny and shrinking school district should remain operational or should look to other options.

About 50 people, less than half the number that attended the previous Monday's meeting, filed into the school gym. Many were repeat attendees. Both meetings were conducted by the Educational Information and Resource Center (EIRC), the outside agency based in Sewell that was hired by the board of education to handle the administrative duties of the district. Several of the elected school board members were in attendance, but did not participate in the public presentation.

The meeting followed an identical format to the April 19 meeting, including the same brainstorming project. EIRC Director Charles Ivory presented the format, and EIRC's Tim Wade, who is one of two acting chief school administrators in the Sea Isle district, presented the results of a feasibility study done earlier this year. Wade, as well as being the district's CSA, was part of the team hired by the city to do the feasibility study.

When the details presented by Wade, and the format to create group graphs listing the positives and negatives mirrored the previous week's activities exactly, about a half dozen of the residents walked out in frustration mid-meeting. Others stayed but expressed similar anger and

frustration, saying they were misled by EIRC into thinking that Monday's meeting would build on the information from the previous week, not serve as a re-run.

Several members of the public said the most recent meeting should have expanded on the results of the April 19 meeting to move the process forward so that the board of education could make a decision on the school's future.

The results from the April 19 meeting's brainstorming exercise were complete, according to Ivory, but the EIRC director said they were not being provided to the public at Monday's meeting because he did not want them to impact ideas the public might otherwise present.

As with the previous week's meeting, the audience was given four possible scenarios to analyze: remaining in the current school, send all students K-12 to Ocean City, send all students K-12 to Middle Township and send K-8 to Dennis Township, with high school students then going to Middle Township.

Despite acknowledgement by both Wade and Ivory that, legally, the withdrawal of high school students from Ocean City would be difficult, lengthy and costly, if not impossible, the Middle Township and Dennis options were not removed from consideration.

Results on the charts created by the public were similar to the previous week's, with most opposing a move to Middle Township or Dennis.

Concerns raised about students remaining in Sea Isle City pre-kindergarten through eighth grade included the shrinking enrollment, which is expected to be about 60 students in five years, combined grade level classrooms, the physical condition of the school building and the

cost of education. Currently Sea Isle is reported to have the highest per-pupil cost in the state, at more than \$35,000 per student.

The benefits of remaining in Sea Isle includes the concept of home rule or control, the longer bus ride to Ocean City, avoiding possible negative impact on local businesses, and small class size.

Next year, the total enrollment in Sea Isle is projected to be 81 students, which includes eight tuition students. Class size will range from a high of 16 in eighth grade to a low of four students in sixth grade. According to Wade, next year all classes will be combined

in two-grade pairings, such as combined pre-kindergarten and kindergarten and first and second grade.

Wade said he does not anticipate any future public meetings regarding the option of the Sea Isle students.

Wade said he does not anticipate the school board voting on whether to remain open or close its doors, when and where students might go either of the school board meetings in May.

The school board will meet on Tuesday, May 22 and Tuesday, May 29. Each meeting begins at 6 p.m. in the school library and is open to the public.