

# **Port Monmouth/New Monmouth Consolidation Proposal**

## **Q & A**

### **1. Why is this proposal happening now?**

There are many reasons why the consolidation is being proposed at this time.

When the S2 bill was signed into law in July 2018, it had an immediate impact on Middletown's schools. The full implementation of this law takes place over a seven year period, starting with the 2018-2019 budget year, and will result in a projected reduction in state aid of \$5.5 million. The district has discussed at board meetings and at its strategic planning forums the anticipated growing budget shortfalls going forward and the need to make changes in our operations and our district footprint in order to preserve our programs and services. At our last budget meeting, the current projected budget shortfall for 2020-2021 of \$2.5 million was included in the presentation. The district has been working to find ways to address this that are not in conflict with our mission and the priorities identified during the strategic planning forums and survey that have taken place over the last several months.

Throughout the strategic planning process, the community overwhelmingly requested that a priority be placed on reducing class size. Research points to smaller class sizes leading to improved student achievement in Title 1 schools. Therefore, the district is working to focus funding on Title 1 schools for class size reduction and other initiatives that will impact student achievement. While the district's enrollment continues to decrease, the district's current structure does not allow for optimal management of class sizes. After analyzing the elementary school enrollment data across the district and reviewing specific scenarios, it became evident that by consolidating Port Monmouth and New Monmouth Schools, lower class size averages could be achieved at the same time as reductions in operating costs and more effective use of federal grant funds to assist at-risk students.

The district has also been working on updating its Long Range Facilities Plan, which identifies significant maintenance and improvement projects for each district building over the next five years. The Plan includes over \$3.8 million in identified facilities projects for the Port Monmouth building and site. These needed projects are not for improvements that will enhance the facility to meet 21st century learning requirements. Currently, at 92 years old, the school's educational and common spaces, such as the gymnasium/cafeteria, do not have the capacity or other essential components of an optimal learning environment. New Monmouth School, the district's newest elementary school, is a flagship facility in the district and can meet the needs of all Port Monmouth and New Monmouth students. Consolidating both schools at this time will provide funding for class size reduction, preserve programs and staffing, and ensure a learning environment that supports students' educational needs in an equitable manner.

### **2. If adopted, when will this transition take effect and how are you preparing for a smooth transition for students?**

The proposal is for the 2020-2021 school year, with a plan for transition to begin during this school year. Although the consolidation plan is still a proposal, the building administrators are planning on organizing visitations by the Port Monmouth students to New Monmouth School by grade level. Students will tour their new school, meet the principal and staff, and have the

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opportunity to meet and spend time with their new classmates. Joint activities will also be planned. Additional opportunities to orient the students to their new school and encourage social interactions among the students will be planned after Board approval of the proposal. The goal is for Port Monmouth students to be comfortable and excited to attend their new school in September and for the New Monmouth students to be eager to see their new friends when they return to school.

3. Are 12 additional classrooms available at New Monmouth for Port Monmouth students?

Twelve additional classrooms will be available at New Monmouth School for the Port Monmouth students. New Monmouth School is the newest elementary school in the district. It has the largest all purpose room as well as a large fenced in playground.

4. Are you looking at future township development projects to project school enrollment? Will there be enough room for new students with Port Monmouth closed?

Our last five year enrollment projection, which was done in January 2017, took into consideration the approved new developments at that time. These district wide projections have been within 1% - 2% accuracy when compared with actual enrollments for the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. The projections indicated that the district's enrollment would continue to decrease each year through 2022. The October 15, 2019 enrollment at Port Monmouth was 8% lower than the 2019-2020 projected enrollment. An updated five year enrollment projection will be performed this spring as the district works on completing its strategic plan for 2020-2025.

5. How does transitioning students from Port Monmouth to New Monmouth lower class sizes?

Consolidating the schools creates a larger Title 1 school. A portion of the district's ESSA funds (Title 1 and II) can be used for class size reduction. In addition, the consolidation will result in reduced costs to the district and the ability to more efficiently utilize budget revenues. Available financial resources will be focused on reducing class size by adding additional elementary class sections as well as preserving programs and services.

6. Are you placing people with the best expertise with their students? When will teachers know where they are being placed?

A component of our efforts to ensure the best education for the Port Monmouth and New Monmouth students is purposefully reviewing our staffing needs and assigning staff to best meet the needs of the students. Improving student achievement in our Title 1 schools, which includes New Monmouth School, is a priority. The consolidation of the two schools will provide more resources, including certificated staff, to provide instruction, remediation and enrichment.

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Once the district's tentative budget is approved, the staffing process will take place. We anticipate the process will be completed by mid-May. The annual Board of Education rehire meeting is scheduled for May 13. Changes are possible due to retirement and resignation notices received after that time.

#### **7. Will staff be laid off?**

A reduction in force (RIF) of staff is not anticipated due to the consolidation of Port Monmouth and New Monmouth Schools. A goal of the consolidation proposal is to reduce class size. To accomplish this, additional class sections are needed which require certified staff members. There are some non-certificated positions and/or certificated support staff positions that may be eliminated due to the consolidation. We anticipate that the staff members in those positions will be reassigned through attrition as we lose staff throughout the district, which occurs every year.

#### **8. Will transportation be provided for students?**

Transportation will be provided to eligible students in accordance with state requirements and board policy. Currently 65% of Port Monmouth's students are eligible for transportation.

At this time, the district runs three bus routes for Port Monmouth students. It is anticipated that one additional bus route will be needed for Port Monmouth students under the consolidation proposal. The cost for the additional bus route has been considered in the consolidation proposal.

#### **9. What will happen with preschool classes?**

Preschool classes housed at New Monmouth will be relocated. Currently, Harmony School and Ocean Avenue School host a portion of the district's preschool program. Several of the New Monmouth classes will be relocated to those schools. A decision on the placement of the other preschool classes will be made shortly.

#### **10. How do class sizes differ among elementary schools?**

The district has set elementary class size limits that apply to all district elementary schools. (K-3: 25 students; 4-5; 27 students) No elementary classes exceed that cap. Almost every elementary school in the district has one or more classes that reach the district's class size limit, and every elementary school has classes that are within one student of the limit.

#### **11. Why haven't tax dollars gone toward the upkeep of Port Monmouth?**

The district has done continuing repair and maintenance at Port Monmouth over the past several years, including painting, sidewalk repairs, and carpet/floor replacements. Major work

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includes the installation of a new roof, a lighting upgrade, and the creation of a kitchen space in the building to facilitate the improvement of food service for the students.

12. Why was the consolidation of schools not mentioned in any of the Strategic Planning forums?

At the seven recent Strategic Planning forums, topics of redistricting, grade banding and changing the district's footprint were discussed and commented upon. The comments most often heard from the community members at the forums and in the survey were class size concerns. As stated in the answer to question #1, this was a driver in developing the proposal.

13. What would the full costs be to have the school remain open?

The personnel and facilities operating costs allocated to Port Monmouth Elementary School are almost \$2.8 million annually, not including capital projects in the Long Range Facilities Plan or other unexpected needs.

14. What will be the cost of maintaining this unoccupied building?

The building will continue to be insured, there will still be a cost for utilities (at a reduced level), and maintenance will be done as needed. We estimate that these costs will not exceed \$100k for a year. Continuing costs for this building and property are contingent upon the disposition or use of the site going forward.

15. If the school closes, what will happen to the building and property?

No decisions have been made at this time regarding plans for the building and property if the proposed consolidation plan is approved. There are many options available and they all have to be evaluated to determine what is in the best interest of the district and the community.

16. What services, currently provided at Port Monmouth, would be maintained at New Monmouth? Will personnel (OTs, PTs, Child Study Team, etc.) make the transition to New Monmouth?

All services (OT, PT, CST, Speech) currently provided to the Port Monmouth and New Monmouth students will be provided if the schools are consolidated. New Monmouth will be staffed appropriately to ensure that all students' IEP and 504 needs are met.

17. What is included in the \$3.7 million in maintenance?

The draft of the recently updated Long Range Facilities Plan (2021 - 2025) includes a new fire alarm system; building wide heating and cooling replacements; exterior masonry repair and repointing, bathroom renovations, interior door replacements, ceiling replacements, parking lot milling and repaving, and security improvements.

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18. What would the \$3.7 million in savings be used for?

The draft of the recently updated Long Range Facilities Plan (2021-2025) includes identified capital projects for all 17 of the district's buildings. The projects in the plan for Port Monmouth amount to \$3.8 million. Across the district, the projects in the Long Range Facilities Plan total nearly \$154 million. Since the district will not have available budget funds to address all of these capital projects, the elimination of the projects at Port Monmouth would reduce the project list for a potential future referendum.

19. Have the Taylor Lane development (across from Target) been districted? If so, where will those students be enrolled?

We notified Taylor Lane developers that we have not identified the school to which the students would attend. That decision will be part of the Strategic Planning process. Student enrollment will not be impacted before the 2021-2022 school year.

20. If this consolidation proposal is adopted, can lower class sizes be guaranteed, and for how long (with future developments in the works)?

A primary goal of the consolidation is to reduce class size throughout the district, and particularly in the Title 1 schools. New Monmouth School currently qualifies for Title 1 status. Projections indicate that New Monmouth will not meet the requirements for Title 1 status next year. However, there is a one year grace period. Through the consolidation of Port Monmouth and New Monmouth Schools, New Monmouth School would remain in Title 1 status. With less Title I schools to support and changes in Title I school designations anticipated for next year, opportunity would exist to direct district ESSA funds (Title I and II) toward reducing teacher-to-student ratios and lowering class sizes. The consolidation would also result in reduced costs to the district and the ability to more efficiently utilize budget revenues. Available financial resources will be focused on reducing class size by adding additional elementary class sections as well as preserving programs and services across the district.

As stated above, the goal is to reduce class size, and we guarantee that we will work toward that goal. However, the amount of success we can realize in the future to reach the goal is dependent on future revenues and expenses. This is one reason we are looking at all options to be more efficient. Consolidating Port Monmouth School and New Monmouth School is a step toward greater efficiency, while also providing low class sizes for students of both schools and a better learning environment for the Port Monmouth students. We are continuing to explore other options district wide to be more efficient and reduce class sizes.

21. Where are the 12 additional classrooms coming from? Will facilities (bathrooms, all purpose room, playground, etc.) be able to accommodate an influx of students?

New Monmouth School has sufficient bathrooms, common areas, and an outdoor play area to accommodate the additional students. Currently, there are 6 preschool classrooms that will be relocated to other schools in the district. There are also more than six other full size classrooms available. In total there will be more than 12 classrooms available. To ensure students are

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placed in the appropriately equipped and sized classrooms for their grade level, the classroom locations at New Monmouth School will be reorganized next year.

22. How will on site parking for school wide events at New Monmouth be impacted?

Parking for school wide events at many elementary schools in the district require special parking plans that temporarily use areas of the school ground in addition to the paved parking lot. New Monmouth will create these plans if the consolidation proposal is approved.

23. What are the projections/enrollment numbers for kindergarten next year?

Click for [enrollment projections as of February 21](#).

24. How will this impact before and aftercare programs? Will New Monmouth be able to host these programs with an influx of new students?

There is no limit to the number of students who can attend the Before/Aftercare Program in any school. The organization will add staff to maintain the required staff to student ratios. Various areas in the building are and will continue to be utilized by groups of students in the program for different activities, such as the library, classroom space, gymnasium, outdoor space, etc.

25. How would Title I funds be used at New Monmouth Elementary School?

As stated above, ESSA grant allocations (Title I and II) would be primarily directed toward reducing teacher-to-student ratios, lowering class sizes and preserving mathematics and literacy interventions. In addition, funds must be reserved to offer family engagement opportunities. The district is also exploring the opportunity to fund extraordinary staff professional development to enhance the instruction of early literacy skills.

26. Why haven't we considered sending all students living in the 07758 area code to Port Monmouth as a way to increase enrollment at Port Monmouth?

The Port Monmouth School building is an aging facility that does not meet the standards of a 21st century learning environment. The common spaces are not adequate in size for the current population. Adding students would exacerbate the current problems.

27. How will families with children at different schools (e.g. a special needs student at Harmony and another at Port Monmouth/New Monmouth) be accommodated?

This is an issue that is handled on a case-by-case basis at every elementary school.

28. Specifically, what are the repairs needed to make the school ADA compliant?

The floor plan of Port Monmouth makes its ADA accessibility very limited. There are very few spaces available from the main or other entrances of the building without going up or down stairs. The APR cannot be reached without going down stairs.

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29. If Port Monmouth and River Plaza are approximately the same age, how is River Plaza ADA compliant and Port Monmouth is not?

River Plaza is not a fully ADA compliant building. At River Plaza, the majority of the classrooms, the main office, the nurse's office and the APR are all on one level, making all of these spaces accessible. However, none of River Plaza's bathrooms are truly ADA accessible. This is different than Port Monmouth - very few spaces are accessible on the same level as the entrances.

In fact, none of our elementary schools are fully ADA compliant. There are some elementary schools that are more ADA accessible than others. New Monmouth, Harmony, Nut Swamp, Ocean Avenue and Bayview all have some ADA accessible bathrooms. New Monmouth Elementary also has recently replaced its elevator.

30. Why is an item of this magnitude being voted on so soon? Can it be pushed back to have more time for consideration?

The Board and the administration have been discussing the district's declining enrollment and the inefficiencies of operating the number of schools that we have for the last couple of years. The district must submit a 2020-2021 tentative budget for review by the NJ Department of Education no later than March 20, 2020. We have been working on this budget since the fall, updating and revising it continuously. At our February 5 budget workshop, we informed the Board and the public that there is currently a \$2.5 million budget deficit projected for next year. This proposal is part of a number of items that have been identified as potential budget adjustments to close this gap.

31. Why are other options not being considered (redistricting, etc.)?

During the upcoming years, numerous other options and courses of action will be considered as the district continues to lose state aid funding, address shifts and decreases in enrollment, contend with aging facilities, while the budget gap continues to increase. This will require continued focus on our district's sending zones, footprint, organization of grade levels, etc. Please see question 1 for reasons why the Port Monmouth/New Monmouth Consolidation Proposal was made at this time.

32. What is going to happen to preschool students in need of services at New Monmouth? Are services available for these students at other schools (OT, PT, Child Study Team, etc.)?

All services required by the preschool students will be available at the new location. Staffing additions will be made as required to ensure students IEP and 504 needs are met.

33. Can the research, data, and figures that went into this proposal be shared with the community?

The district will be presenting information regarding the proposal at the next parent meeting scheduled for Monday, February 24 at Middletown High School North at 7 PM. For budget

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information and other data, you can view the [Budget Meetings](#) videos and workshop presentations and [Strategic Planning Meeting Forum 3A Slideshow](#) on the district website.

34. If the consolidation plan is adopted, is it guaranteed that there will be four sections offered for each grade level at New Monmouth?

Each year, the District uses projections calculated in the Spring, which are based on pre-registrations and historical enrollment data, to anticipate staffing needs for the upcoming school year. Based on the current enrollment and pre-registrations at least 4 sections per grade are projected at New Monmouth School if the consolidation plan is approved. If student enrollment declines due to students exiting the school and/or increased due to additional student registrations, then adjustments may be necessary if the current projections are significantly impacted.

35. 2020-2021 Budget

At the February 5, 2020 budget meeting, we discussed the current projected budget deficit of \$2.5 million. In addition to the \$1.2 million in projected savings that would be realized by consolidating Port Monmouth and New Monmouth Elementary Schools, \$1.3 million in other reductions in programs and services would need to be implemented in order to close this gap. Items being considered to eliminate the remaining \$1.3 million deficit include an estimated reduction in health insurance costs (very preliminary) - \$500,000; partial deferral of payment for new K-5 math adoption to the 2021-2022 year - \$225,000; reduction in the replacement of smartboards in classrooms - \$224,000; elimination of the Dreambox math program - \$103,000; elimination of the elementary Poricy Park field trips - \$55,000; elimination of elementary Fitness Clubs - \$14,000; reduction in athletic transportation - impact to be determined; utilizing half of the district's maintenance reserve to fund next year's current expenses - \$250,000. Without the implementation of the \$1.2 million in cost reductions anticipated from the consolidation of Port Monmouth and New Monmouth Elementary Schools, approximately 15 additional positions would need to be eliminated. This will negatively impact class sizes and other instructional supports.

36. If the proposal to consolidate Port Monmouth School and New Monmouth School is approved, is there enough capacity at New Monmouth School for all the students?

Our current data system provides 17 years of student enrollment data. In eight of the seventeen years, student enrollment at New Monmouth School was in excess of 500 students during the period of 2003-2004 to 2011-2012. During the highest year, 2009-2010, 558 students were enrolled. All of those years fall prior to the renovation to create five regular classrooms and four small group instruction rooms in the New Monmouth pod. Only in the last three years has the enrollment dropped to less than 400 students. As of February 21, there are 466 Port Monmouth and New Monmouth students combined registered for the 2020-2021 school year.