

MEMORANDUM

TO: North Syracuse Community Advisory Committee

FROM: Deb Ayers, Jen Heckathorn, John Wisniewski

RE: Meeting Notes - Meeting of August 25, 2025

DATE: August 27, 2025

Attendance:

Committee Members: Dave Babikian, Taryn Bakal, Sophia Burden, Katie Burke, Liz Cannella, Nancy Congdon, Kate DeBottis, Andrew Dolson, Rosemary Farfaglia, Molly Gaeta, Sara Garvey, Kelly Glashauser, Sarah Jones, Jillian Knapp, Cheryl McDonald, Sara Morrice, Donna Marie Norton, Phil Smith, Jamie Sullivan, Sean Sullivan, Naomi Trivison, Shannan Vaillant, Emma Watson

Consultants: Deb Ayers, Jen Heckathorn, John Wisniewski

District Administrators: Matthew Erwin

Location: North Syracuse Junior High School

1. A building tour of North Syracuse Junior High School was led by Naomi Trivison, principal. Upon return, the committee noted their “notices” and “wonderings” about the building, which can be found at the end of the notes. The agenda for the meeting was presented and reviewed as well.

2. Deb reviewed the upcoming meeting schedule as follows:

| Date | Topic | Location |
|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Monday, August 25 | Facilities/Brainstorming | NS Junior High School |
| Monday, September 15 | Financial status of the district and exploration of future facility scenarios, including Haber study outcomes | Gillette Road Middle School |
| Tuesday , October 21 | Staffing patterns and exploration of future facilities scenarios | KWS Bear Road Elementary School |
| Monday, November 10 | Overview of district transportation operation and exploration of future facilities scenarios | Cicero Elementary School |
| Monday, December 8 | Review of draft final report | District Office |

The meeting topics have been re-ordered based on factors influencing the study outcomes.

3. Deb then reviewed the district's critical question:

“How can the North Syracuse Central School District strategically restructure its staffing, facilities, and grade-level configurations to optimize educational outcomes and emotional well-being for all students, while addressing declining enrollment, reduced state aid, and future growth opportunities like the Micron project?”

4. Dr. Jen Heckathorn reviewed the meeting takeaways from the July 25, 2025, meeting on elementary instructional programming.

5. Jen continued the review of the instructional programs at the middle schools, junior high school, and high school. Data of note: schools are increasingly diverse, Gillette Road MS has approximately 300 more students than Roxboro Road MS, significantly more economically disadvantaged students at Roxboro Road MS than Gillette Road (60% v 39%), Gillette Road students are performing better on NYS assessments in Math and ELA than Roxboro Road but Roxboro Road students have shown growth in Math achievement when compared to results from 5 years ago, JH 8th graders have improved in both Math and ELA assessment results, chronic absenteeism has increased at the HS, and students are graduating with Regents Advanced Diplomas at a much higher rate than the NYS average.

A rich discussion with committee members followed when asked, “What initial thoughts do you have about the instructional programming at NSCSD?” Comments shared include:

- Can we look at data for subgroups? Jen will follow up with the group with some more data for those that are interested.
- Proficiency rates for 8th grade are still low but students rebound and graduate on time.
- Can we get HS data for ELA and Math proficiency? Have to rely on Regents data since no statewide tests in HS. Can we look at AIMSWeb data for HS? Not a perfect correlation to statewide tests.
- Students opting out of tests (highest at MS, JH) influence state testing results.
- Inconsistent programming in elementary content/classrooms, often due to teacher preferences. This is improving.
- Frustrating to hear “not low enough to get help”. More programming is needed to help students who don't qualify for Academic Intervention Services (AIS).
- Are there better curricular programs/interventions for the Roxboro Road buildings to help struggling students? The new math curriculum has shown some promising results.

- There is no curriculum silver bullet - especially challenging with ELA
- Wonder about vertical alignment of curricula (between grades and buildings)
- Don't really have a Social Studies curriculum at elementary schools.
- Use Smithsonian science curriculum but time for instruction in elementary classrooms varies widely
- WINN (What I Need Now) time - is this implemented consistently across grade levels?
- Roxboro Elem piloted some new instructional strategies this spring
- Concern about alternative education programs. Out-of-district students are not graduating on time. Should we bring these students back in-district?
- Concerns about continuity of instruction and curricula between grades 9-12, even within the same courses (but different teachers)
- Heavy district focus on improving tier 1 (what is taught to all students) instruction
- Aligning K-7 with standards-based report cards
- Duplication of instructional effort at 7 - 8 and also 9-12. Missed opportunities and inefficiencies with staffing. This also works in reverse, where students have to select a pathway early on and then wait to reselect at the high school if the chosen pathway turns out not to be working.
- Much is happening that's teacher and/or building-driven. Requires change in culture, etc. to improve consistency across buildings throughout the district. There are skilled educators that could collaborate across classrooms/buildings. This is getting better with changes in the teachers' contract and new union leadership.
- Inconsistencies with grading, course content, and instructional strategies.
- Cultural inconsistencies and messaging; need to make sure that instructional practices are culturally responsive and sustaining
- Inconsistencies in the selection of honors students between Rox MS and Gillette. There have been improvements in this area recently. Currently using the same criteria but can still question if it's the best/right criteria.
- Little differentiation of instruction within honors courses
- Wonder if there is a north/south divide for participation in college and AP courses.
- Change in WINN time at Rox MS at end of year (reduced/eliminated) was problematic for students
- MS schedules are dictated by transportation. Also, teachers at the middle schools aren't contractually required to be in the buildings much past dismissal time. This means there is limited opportunity for students to get extra help.
- Teachers' contract can influence building scheduling, etc. Can make it difficult to implement change. Contract is evolving to allow more flexibility.
- Elementary teachers are responsible for a broad range of student needs beyond curriculum, most especially the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) needs of students.

We recognize that some people may wish to gain a deeper understanding of data related to achievement and discipline, particularly when disaggregated by subgroups (e.g., racial groups, students with disabilities, English Language Learners). However, because the critical question is not focused solely on academic outcomes, spending more committee time on the data is unlikely to advance our goals. Therefore, to support that interest without shifting our focus, we will include a brief cheat sheet at the end of the notes that explains how to access additional data.

6. John Wisniewski discussed the Building Condition Survey (BCS), Annual Visual Inspection (AVI) and district master plan requirements from NYSED and provided an overview of the elementary school, middle school, junior high school, and high school buildings including year of original construction, total square footage, number of floors, grades housed, number of students served, and overall building condition rating. He noted that, with the exception of the NSEEP building, the district school buildings are between 50 and 70 years old. The buildings are well-maintained, and the district has implemented capital improvement planning that has resulted in a number of building improvements in recent years, with additional work approved for completion over the next several years.

7. Elementary school room usage was reviewed, including information on the number of full-sized rooms, the number of classrooms at each grade level, the room usage of other full-sized classrooms, and usage of rooms less than standard classroom size. The Lakeshore Elementary data is a projection since the building is currently under construction. In the consultants' experience, the number of full-size rooms used for classes other than grade level sections is slightly higher than in other districts. It was noted by the committee that one additional UPK room is located at Allen Road Elementary in 2025-26.

The same room utilization data were also shared for the middle, junior high, and high school buildings as well as NSEEP. Since the current Melvin Administrative Building was previously used as an elementary school, full size room counts were also presented.

8. John reviewed the data from the Building Condition Survey, Annual Visual Inspection, and district master plan for the district's instructional buildings. A summary of the improvements needed as identified in the Building Condition Survey and prioritized by the district master planning team was presented. The data clearly show that ongoing building maintenance to protect the community investment in its buildings is a costly endeavor.

9. John also shared a summary of the capital project work approved by district voters in December 2021, May 2022, and December 2022. Some work is in progress, some is slated to begin in 2026, and some is still under review by NYSED.

10. Deb asked the committee to consider the guiding goals that have emerged from the committee's work to date.

- Bring students together in one building at an earlier grade level
- Reduce, or at least do not increase, the number of transitions between buildings for students
- Address disparity in instruction/achievement between buildings
- Address concerns about Junior High School climate

Committee comments:

- An important part of the work should be to get the 7th and 8th grade aligned in one building for scheduling, course alignment, teacher certification, reduced need for transportation shuttling for extracurricular activities, etc. Better alignment between 9th and 10th grade should also be strongly considered.
- Will changing grade configurations and buildings sufficiently address achievement issues?
- Can we improve alignment between grade levels / buildings / attendance zones?
- Concerns about disparity in working conditions between buildings and/or grade levels within the teachers' contract
- What are systemic issues vs. what are instructional issues?

11. Deb also reviewed preliminary building observations based on NYSED building occupancies, historical building enrollment data, and enrollment projections:

- 4 grade levels could fit in CNS. It was noted that the course offerings and student support services are more robust now than when the building enrollment was higher.
- 3 grade levels could fit in North Syracuse JH but 4 will not.
- Neither middle school building can hold three entire grade levels.
- The current six elementary schools with the current class sizes based on the 2024-25 enrollment cannot hold 6 grade levels such as K-5 but if any of these variables change, it may possibly work.

Deb noted that these observations are simply a count of rooms and students.

12. Due to time constraints, the group activity below was started but the committee will return to the activity at the September meeting to finish their brainstorming and then report their thinking to the whole group.

****Group Activity**** The committee was organized in groups of 4-6 people, and each group responded to one of the topics below. In their responses, the groups were asked to identify

benefits, costs, obstacles, and aids to each scenario. They were also asked to consider facilities, academics, extracurriculars, and transportation.

- NSEEP in a stand-alone building vs. 4410 PK classrooms distributed in multiple elementary buildings
- Kindergarten - Grade 2 vs. Kindergarten - Grade 3 vs. Kindergarten - Grade 4 vs. Kindergarten - Grade 5
- Grades K-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-12
- Keeping grade configurations as they currently are (K-4, 5-7, 8-9, 10-12) but rearranging buildings so students come together at 5th grade in the current NSJHS
- Grades 9 - 12 vs. Grades 10 - 12

13. The next community advisory committee meeting will be held on Monday, September 15, 2025 at Gillette Road Middle School. The building tour will begin at 5:30 p.m. and the meeting of the advisory committee will begin at 6:00 p.m.

We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on August 25th. If you have questions with these notes, please feel free to contact us. We will also review these notes as the first agenda item at our next meeting.

Looking forward to seeing you again on September 15.

North Syracuse Junior High School
Building Tour Debrief

| Noticings | Wonderings |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The building is so big that it is difficult for students to utilize their lockers between classes/at the end of the day (remediation: trying to consolidate the supplies that teachers require students to bring to each class and maximize efficient use of the Chromebooks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students do use their lockers here because there is not room for backpacks in classrooms (students are not allowed to carry backpacks) ● Surprised that there are 3 entries for students during arrival (but that's the case at other buildings throughout the district) ● This building is pretty much the same (except for the 2 additions) as it was in the 1980s when it was a high school. ● Really clean/well-maintained, but definitely dated ● There are ~15-20 classrooms where there is a maximum of 20 students allowed (due to the space--inside/outside classrooms are different sizes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The small classes make collaborative learning difficult (especially when students have backpacks with them) ● There are team rooms for the storage of students' sports equipment ● AC in all areas except cafeterias ● Largest auditorium in the area (approximately 1400 seats) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the passing time between classes (answer: 4 minutes); ~1200 current students ● Is there the potential for alternatives to lockers (for example, clear backpacks)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ But keep in mind, students only have 4 classes each day at this building (unlike at the Middle Schools, where they have 7 periods) ○ There is also about 10 minutes between the end of the day and busses leaving ● How is NS CSD organizing the traditional FACS/Tech (FACS = Family and Consumer Sciences--think Home Economics) courses? Are they taking advantage of the middle school waiver to offer more career/technical integrated courses? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Answer: Because of the 8/9 configuration, there are other opportunities for tech courses (e.g., Project Lead the Way, intro to Tech that rolls into courses at the high school) ● Would restructuring grade levels make it easier to offer different courses? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ JEN--be sure to include information in the report on the middle school requirements ● There's an elevator in the middle of the "Tower" for students in wheelchairs/on crutches |

Publicly Available Data: A Cheat Sheet

- Open <https://data.nysed.gov>. Use the search box to type **North Syracuse** and select **North Syracuse Central School District** or any of the North Syracuse CSD individual buildings.
- Once on the district/building specific page, you can select from a number of types of reports:
 - If you are interested in subgroup achievement data, click on the “School Report Card” link
 - If you are interested in student suspension data, click on the “School Report Card” link
 - If you are interested in fiscal information, click on the “Financial Transparency Report” link
- If you are interested in achievement data, once on the “School Report Card” page, you can identify the data you are interested in viewing. Scroll to the assessment section and then select the assessment(s) you would like to see. Then, click “build report”.
 - This will pull information about the test and break it down by subgroup. You can also see previous years’ data by clicking on the “Archive” button on the left-hand side of the screen.
- If you are interested in suspension data, once on the “School Report Card” page, scroll to the bottom and select “Civil Rights Data Collection” and then click “Build Report”. You will be able to download a spreadsheet that you can filter for North Syracuse. You can also use the Glossary provided to look up the different information reported.
- All data on data.nysed.gov is also available as downloadable databases that can be filtered and used to build custom reports on achievement in the district.