

MEMORANDUM

TO: North Syracuse Community Advisory Committee

FROM: Deb Ayers, Jen Heckathorn, John Wisniewski

RE: Meeting Notes - Meeting of September 15, 2025

DATE: September 17, 2025

Attendance:

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

Consultants: Deb Ayers, Jen Heckathorn, John Wisniewski

District Administrators: Matthew Erwin, Christopher Leahey, Don Keegan

Location: Gillette Road Middle School

1. A building tour of Gillette Road Middle School was led by Sarah Jones, 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 Ayers reviewed the upcoming meeting schedule as follows:

Date	Topic	Location
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
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The meeting topics have been reordered 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. Deb reviewed the meeting takeaways from the August 25, 2025, meeting on facilities.
5. Jen Heckathorn led the committee in returning to the Group Activity from the August 25th meeting. The committee reorganized into their groups of 4-5 people and were given a grade level configuration to consider.

They were asked to consider: benefits, costs, obstacles, and aids to that configuration while thinking about all components of the educational program, including academics, facilities, extracurriculars, and transportation.

The groups were given time to finish their brainstorming and note-taking and were asked to pause to hear the Fiscal Overview and Capital Projects presentation.

6. Deb Ayers led a Fiscal Overview presentation. She covered the topic of School Budgets, including the subtopics of Balance Sheet, Fund Balance, and Property Taxes.
7. Deb Ayers led a presentation on Capital Projects/Building Aid, and incorporated the information from the August presentation on the Building Condition Surveys.
8. Deb Ayers also reviewed the findings from the Ross Haber & Associates Study from February 2024. She incorporated the current consultants' observations about the feasibility of the options that Ross Haber & Associates presented.
9. Jen Heckathorn led the committee in returning to the group activity. The groups were asked to return to their notes and make adjustments based on the information presented by Deb during the Fiscal Overview and Capital Project presentations. The groups were also asked to plan for their group's report out to the whole group for next meeting by answering the following questions:

- Highlights: what did you spend the most time talking about in your group? What are the most important things you want the group to know about your conversation?
- Hidden Gem: What is something you talked about in your group that you don't want to lose sight of?
- Advise: Where did your group land in its thinking? Did you have a consensus? If not, why?

10. Deb Ayers reviewed the meeting's takeaways.

- District is currently in solid fiscal condition.
- Current reserve funding is adequate but continued exploration of strategies to be intentional about increasing reserve funding is warranted. Reserve funding levels from 5 years ago were inadequate.
- Use of assigned fund balance should be carefully monitored. Continued increases could jeopardize the district's future fiscal stability
- Unassigned fund balance level is appropriate
- North Syracuse current building aid ratio = 84.9%
- 2038-39 first year for drop in capital debt
- Increasing property values
- Decreasing true value tax rate
- Significant amount of capital project work has been authorized in past several years
- 2024 Ross Haber & Associates study presented 4 options for possible building utilization along with reconfiguration change of middle school attendance zones

11. The next community advisory committee meeting will be held on **Tuesday**, October 21, 2025, at KWS Bear Road Elementary School. The building tour will begin at 5:30 p.m., and the meeting of the advisory committee will start at 6:00 p.m.

We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on September 15th. If you have questions about 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 **Tuesday**, October 21st.

**Gillette Road Middle School
Building Tour Debrief**

Noticings	Wonderings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Every space is being used. The building seems to be at capacity, especially with the 4th grade being here (Lakeshore Rd. Elementary)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Through the end of 2025-2026○ But then the next layer of renovation starts and grade levels shift again● Does not seem to be enough music space for whole ensembles to practice--there are more smaller spaces for individual practice● This is a bright and open space with a lot of natural light. Building is also immaculately maintained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Question about the instructional programming for middle school students (related to financial management/personal finance course)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ This is all related to the middle school requirements