



Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda Union Free School District

**PRESS RELEASE
and/or
MEDIA ADVISORY
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Ken-Ton School District Announces School Closing Recommendation

Jefferson Elementary School is recommended for closing in 2013-2014 and Lindbergh, Edison, Franklin, and Hoover Elementary Schools will receive Jefferson's students

Tonawanda – Earlier this year Superintendent of Schools Mark P. Mondanaro indicated to the public and Board of Education that he would make a singular school closing recommendation for the 2013-2014 school year by August 15, 2012. Over the past four years, the school district has eliminated over 170 teaching, administrative and support staff positions in an ongoing effort to control costs in this changed economy. Over this time frame, some of the reductions have begun to affect students directly either through increased class sizes, partial elimination of some academic programs, as well as the reduction of some extracurricular and athletic opportunities. The district's structural budget deficit grew to 12.49 million dollars during last year's budget planning process, and reductions in middle school teaming, elementary health, and grade 6 foreign language were made, in addition to numerous other reductions. The controversial reduction suggestion of a modified kindergarten program was also discussed but not acted upon.

“Our school district received the same amount of state aid this year that it did five years ago” Mondanaro indicated.” Increased pension costs and other state mandates have taken a toll on our district as they have every district in this state. We have taken many reductions to right size our district in this changed economy, including asking the community to consider more conservative transportation eligibility guidelines and the selling of the Green Acres School, both of which they approved last April. We have the tools of fund balance and reserves, the tax levy, and state aid as the major budget revenue components. We have known for some time that taxes should only be raised so much, state aid is not returning at the pace we hoped for, and our budget usable fund balance and reserves use has been drawn down significantly over the past four years. This school closing recommendation, although difficult to make, is made with the objective of preserving and increasing, not limiting, student educational programs and opportunities in our school district. The only components of any substantive savings we can reduce now are non-mandated educational programs, and the community has made it clear they do not want too much more of these types of reductions. In fact, it is the community that has

called for consideration of closing some schools at numerous public budget work sessions over the past two years.”

Mondanaro presented the official report and recommendation to the school board at tonight’s August 14, 2012 Board of Education meeting. The report and presentation are at this link:

<http://www.kenton.k12.ny.us/Page/147>

Mondanaro made it clear that although this report indicated a savings of just fewer than 2.5 million dollars, the more accurate number would be determined before the 2013-2014 budget is adopted. He also made it clear that the acceptance of the recommendation may not mean that other reductions would not have to be made in the upcoming budget planning season.

President Bob Dana remarked, “This is simply one of many difficult decisions we have been required to face over the past few years, **but there’s never ever anything simple about them**. They require significant research, followed by significant thought that can at times become emotionally charged. This decision is ONLY being made now to help us get through the next budget process. We just can’t wait!

As you all know, operating a District this size requires significant financial resources, which has been extremely difficult over the last two years. Therefore, we must reduce spending in an effort to have any hope of achieving our goal as a premier District anytime in the near future. The savings we can realize now will benefit all of our students down the line. I believe in the future of Ken-ton because regardless of the decision we face, everyone I speak with really cares and in the end our children will surely benefit.”

Mondanaro also recommended the hiring of SES Study Team, LLC, for a much larger whole district facility use and educational program study in a detailed process that will include public meetings and community focus groups. The purpose of this study will be to explore future opportunities for possible consolidation to contain operating costs. The study is being paid for by extra legislative funds afforded the district for this purpose. The final results of that study may not be complete until May of 2013. At its enrollment peak the district housed 22,000 students in 23 school buildings. The district now operates 13 schools with an enrollment of 7300. The district will be launching a dedicated consolidation project website link at its district home page starting August 17, 2012.

Both the 2013-2014 school closing and SES Study Team recommendations were approved by the Board of Education at tonight’s meeting.

“We educate, prepare, and inspire students to achieve their highest potential”