

## NESHAMINY

## Study outlines options for closing schools

*The board also asked for administrative and faculty feedback.*

By RACHEL CANELLI COURIER TIMES

The question in Neshaminy is no longer will a school close — but which one, or ones, should close.

After a recent feasibility study by McKissick Associates showed many district buildings are underused, officials have talked about closing a school, or schools, to save money.

Firm representative Vern McKissick recently updated the board with cost details on various choices, including building a new central elementary school or restructuring the district's schools to a kindergarten through eighthgrade model.

The board will talk about those options during a special meeting at 7 p.m. Wednesday at Maple Point Middle School in Middletown.

Most of the choices include implementing a full-time kindergarten program, renovating a majority of the buildings and closing the Tawanka Learning Center, the district's alternative school, McKissick said.

For example, Neshaminy could close Samuel Everitt Elementary, Neshaminy Middle and Tawanka. It would cost the district between \$3 million and \$13 million to renovate its elementary and middle schools, but Neshaminy could save several hundred thousand dollars through staff reductions and millions in operational costs, he said.

The district could also get between \$300,000 and \$2.7 million if it leases facilities like the Lower Southampton or Joseph Ferderbar elementary schools, McKissick said.

Or Neshaminy could sell buildings, including Everitt and Maple Point Middle School, for between \$4 million and \$31 million each, McKissick said.

With roughly \$20 million in state aid, that project could cost the district about \$47 million, he said.

Another option would be for Neshaminy to build a new central elementary school for about \$12 million, renovate the other elementary schools and close Herbert Hoover and Lower Southampton elementary schools, plus Neshaminy Middle and Tawanka. With an expected \$20 million in state aid for the project, the district could pay roughly \$57 million for that option, officials said.

Currently, Neshaminy's schools are structured in this way: first through fifth in elementary; sixth through ninth in middle; and grades 10, 11 and 12 in the high school, administrators said.

But McKissick also discussed reorganizing the grade levels to fifth through eighth in the middle schools and closing Lower Southampton, Pearl S. Buck and Samuel Everitt elementary schools as well as Neshaminy Middle and Tawanka. That could cost an estimated \$38.7 million with about \$18 million in help from the state, McKissick said.

If Neshaminy closed Lower Southampton, Hoover and Everitt and restructured to a third-through eighthgrade model, it would cost roughly \$40 million with about \$17 million in state aid, officials said.

The district could close Lower Southampton, Hoover and Everitt elementary schools and convert to a second- through eighth-grade model for roughly the same cost, McKissick said.

Neshaminy also could convert Hoover into a K-8 school, closing Lower Southampton, Oliver Heckman, Pearl Buck, Everitt and Walter S. Miller elementary schools. That would cost about \$65 million, with roughly \$20 million in state reimbursement, he said.

In most of the cases, McKissick said the renovation costs could be offset by savings in staff and operation costs or with rental or sale income.

Business administrator Joseph Paradise previously told board members they might need to close one or more schools if they don't want to raise taxes this year.

The district could close an elementary school or a middle school — or both — within the next year, according to McKissick. He also urged officials to seriously consider upgrading the remaining schools to save operational costs.

The board already has agreed to close 16 of its 22 modular classrooms.

Neshaminy has one high school, which is in the midst of an \$82-million renovation, four middle schools, eight elementary schools and an alternative school, administrators said.

Officials said they still plan to move ninth-graders to the high school, which previously led to talks of closing one middle school — Neshaminy.

Under state law, the board must hold a public hearing 90 days before action is taken. The board must also advertise the hearing 15 days before it's held, said district solicitor Thomas J. Profy III.

"Time is of the essence," said board member Ritchie Webb. "Everybody is sitting on pins and needles. But with the economics being what they are, we have to take drastic action."

Board member William O'Connor asked Assistant Superintendent Lou Muenker to get feedback from teachers and board President Richard Eccles asked the administration to make a recommendation to the board.