

7th & 8th Grade Send Receive Q & A

This document contains questions and answers that have been posed by parents and community members, via phone, email, in-person meetings, and our Q & A sessions held on January 15th. If there is a question that is not on here that you would like answered please send it to barcurio@lebanonschool.org. There may be some redundancy, but we tried to minimize this as we added questions from our Q & A sessions.

Process

Q: What caused this issue, research, and decision now?

A: This idea was considered by a previous superintendent and was never brought to the Board for an official review process. We were approached by Clinton Public School in October regarding interest in engaging in a send/receive contract with us for our 7th and 8th-grade students. After receiving this inquiry, the Board and Mr. Arcurio decided to investigate. After a compelling presentation by Clinton Public School, we invited Clinton Township Schools to make a presentation and conducted research to make a decision. The year to year contract we have with Clinton Township has a clause indicating that either party must notify the other in writing by January 1st of the school year preceding any desired termination of the agreement.

Q: Why was there nothing in the Lebanon Lantern about this?

A: The submission for the Lebanon Lantern was due on December 3, 2018. Mr. Arcurio emailed the Lantern to find out when the issue would be coming out and was told that it would be published over the school's winter break. On December 3rd there was nothing that could be reported accurately that far in advance.

Q: Why was the December 20th vote not announced at the concert?

A: It simply was not. There was no agenda to hide the vote. We normally have a handful of the public at our meetings. We had double-digit attendees at our regular November and December Meetings and our Special Meeting on December 20th.

Q: Why were only 7th and 8th-grade families surveyed?

A: The thought process was to get input from those families that have students currently attending CTMS.

Q: What is the purpose of the feasibility study and how much does it cost?

A: After the Board voted to pursue terminating the current contract with CTSD and send the letter indicating this, our next step is to conduct a feasibility study to ensure that this move does not affect either district negatively either educationally, financially or demographically. In essence, it cannot adversely affect programs, damage either district financially and it cannot upset the racial or ethnic balance of either district. We are currently getting quotes for the cost of the study.

Q: Why is Clinton Public the district that we are considering and not others?

A: Clinton Public expressed an interest in educating our students. Additionally, the physical proximity of the school is similar to that of CTMS. Also, prior to our agreement with CTSD, we had a send/receive

agreement with Clinton Public, so it is a relationship that we have had before.

Q: Will any of these questions/discussions be presented to the BOE?

A: All information, questions and comments that have been shared with Mr. Arcurio have been passed on to the Board of Education.

Q: Will the final vote be opened to the public, not only to sit in but to participate in the vote as well? Not sure if there instances where the public vote is required/allowed.

A: The Board of Education has voted to pursue termination of our agreement with Clinton Township. The public votes to elect the Board Members to represent the interests of the students and the community. The public is encouraged to make comment to the Board regarding any and all issues but does not vote on them.

Q: What factors went into the decision to terminate the contract with Clinton Township School District?

A: Some areas that have been discussed and considered include: academics, enrichment opportunities, sports and activities opportunities, standardized assessment scores, parent survey results, the presentations, administrative stability, district climate, tuition, administrative relationship, transition plan, special education services, communication, professional development and articulation opportunities for staff, alignment of the curriculum with LBS, opportunities for

prek-6 partnerships, and long-range planning.

Academics/Achievement/Enrichment/Activities

Q: How many CPS kids are on the High Honor Roll in High School?

A: The 2018 graduating high school class had 8 students on the High Honor Roll and 5 students on the Honor Roll. This was a particularly small class of only 23 students that year. Thus, the number of CPS students who made the honor roll in last year's graduating class is 13 out of 23.

Q: Aren't the offerings for enrichment, activities, and sports better at CTMS?

A: Both Schools have similar sports offerings and numerous activities and enrichment opportunities. Although the schools are different sizes, they both ensure that students have a variety of things in which to be involved outside of the curriculum. The concern seems to be that CPS does not have much to offer our students. Here is a list of extracurricular activities from this school year:

- Student Council
- Yearbook
- Peer 2 Peer
- 5-8 Musical
- Boys & Girls Cross Country
- Boys & Girls Soccer
- Volleyball
- Boys & Girls Basketball
- Cheerleading
- Softball
- Baseball
- Band

- Chorus
- Strings
- Technology Student Association
- Junior Solar Sprints
- Engineering Club

Q: Why are you now discussing synchronizing the curriculums with CPS, when this has been an ongoing issue for years between Lebanon and Clinton Township?

A: Because all districts in NJ are aligned to the NJ Student Learning Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards there is not a great variation in the curriculum. The research in this area indicated that both districts have curricula that extend from ours. This was an area that had no significant difference in the spreadsheet shared in the newsletter.

Q: It looks like CTMS is an academically superior school. Why would we switch to a school that is not as good?

A: There are no metrics that we have reviewed that indicate that either school is substantially higher or lower academically.

Q: What is the comparison of test scores between CTMS and CPS?

A: The standardized test scores that were reviewed (which are linked in the newsletter) indicate that the 9th-grade PSAT and PARCC scores are commensurate for students coming from both schools. Each school is slightly higher in different areas. Last years 7th and 8th-grade PARCC scores are indicative of all of the test scores. See below:

PARCC DATA 17-18 % Meeting or Exceeding

CTMS Grade 7 ELA (73 % Meeting or Exceeding)

Clinton Glen Gardner 7 ELA (84% Meeting or Exceeding)

CTMS Grade 7 Math (59% Meeting or Exceeding)

Clinton Glen Gardner 7 Math (67 % Meeting or Exceeding)

CTMS Alg 1 (95% Meeting or Exceeding)

Clinton Glen Gardner Alg 1 (93% Meeting or Exceeding)

CTMS Grade 8 ELA (80% Meeting or Exceeding)

Clinton Glen Gardner 8 ELA (78% Meeting or Exceeding)

Q: How are the special education services at Clinton Public?

A: Both schools have comprehensive special education offerings. As per the CPS presentation, they offer the following:

- Replacement Classes
- In-Class Support
- Study Skills----Executive Functioning Skills
- Self Contained Programs
 - Leaps and Foundations
- Supplemental Instruction
- Research-Based Interventions
- Progress Monitoring
- Applied Behavior Analysis Based Instruction
- Data Driven Instruction

Related Services

- Speech and Language Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Parent Training/Home Support
- Behaviorist Consultation

- Social Skills
- Counseling

Full Time

- Social Worker
- School Psychologist
- Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant
- 2 Speech and Language Therapist

Fiscal/Financial Questions

Q: Is the decision to switch to CPS financial?

A: Finances are one of the factors that figure into this decision. Currently, our contract with CTSD dictates that we pay the certified tuition rate for each of our students. This means that each year we pay the state certified amount from the prior year and then when the state certifies the rate months later we pay an adjustment to make up the difference. The current certified rate for 2017-2018 is \$17,488 (we await the adjustment which is traditionally an increase). We paid this and will pay the additional adjustment when we receive the new certified rate. CPS has offered in discussions to have us pay a tuition rate that is set lower than our current rate and has a 2% increase per year which is the maximum that we are allowed to increase our budget each year without a budget vote.

Q: How does Clinton Townships school funding negatively affect Lebanon Borough residents and how is it possible that LBS terminating the contract won't negatively affect Clinton Township?

A: Over the past five years Clinton Township has not budgeted to the 2% CAP, the closest they have come to it is 1.5% and

the furthest they have budgeted from the cap is .33%. The average increase in tuition for Lebanon's 7th and 8th-grade students has been over 9%. This means that Clinton Township has not raised their taxes as much as they could have to fund the schools, but our tuition has increased far beyond the 2% cap. This causes the Lebanon BOE to find ways to address the increases in the tuition from other areas of our total budget while the CTSD BOE has not utilized the financial tools at its disposal.

Q: Is it transportation costs that are affecting our tuition to CTMS?

A: Transportation of our students does not figure into the tuition rate that LBS pays to CTSD. Our transportations costs are a separate bill that we pay to the district above the tuition rate.

Q: What are the issues that LBS has with the CTSD business office?

A: Our business office regularly requests financial information to allow for proper budgeting and for effective financial management and has consistently been faced with no response. LBS has consistently waited for tuition numbers and transportation numbers each year. It is currently January and we have not received the transportation numbers for this year.

Miscellaneous

Q: What are the communication issues that keep being mentioned with CTMS?

A: Communication issues are a common theme in the research regarding the

relationship between LBS and CTMS. This has been indicated in the parent surveys of our current 7th and 8th-grade parents and through anecdotal comments from former LBS/CTMS parents. The communication between the LBS and CTSD administration has been limited in the past, as indicated by former LBS administrators.

Q: How is the climate of the school district a factor in this?

A: Both CTMS and CPS have indicated that their school climates are positive. This is a claim that all districts make. Some of the indicators of positive climate are administrative turnover and collective bargaining history. Districts with positive climate generally have less turnover in administration. Additionally, positive negotiations between the unions and the BOE are an indicator. It is logical that employees are more satisfied when they have settled contracts.

Q: Why are the questions about administrative stability important?

A: Administrative turnover makes it difficult for staff, students, and parents to find continuity in the district. This is no reflection on the current administration at CTSD.

Q: What will happen to the current 7th-grade students at CTMS if the contract is terminated and a new contract signed with CPS?

A: This would not be in the control of LBS. The Board of Education has made it clear that it will request that our current 7th-grade students have the option of remaining at CTMS if we terminate the contract. LBS

would look to enter into a one year contract with CTSD to educate our students entering 8th grade. We have already asked this question and were not given an answer. The response given was that it was too early to ask that question.

Q: Our students have relationships with students that will go to CTMS. Why are we considering switching to a school where they do not have those relationships?

A: This has been considered; however, it will always be an issue if this decision is made. Moving forward the plan is to ensure that LBS K-6 students have more interaction with the students from the district where we will send our 7th and 8th-grade students so that they have strong relationships when they get there. The reality is that if our students are currently involved in activities outside of school they are interacting with children from Clinton Township, Clinton Public, Union Township, Bethlehem Township, High Bridge, etc. The local sports and activities have children from all surrounding districts.

Q: Clinton Township has indicated that they will make adjustments to address our concerns. Why don't we just let them do that?

A: If the termination of the contract does not occur and we remain in a relationship with Clinton Township, it will be the expectation of our Board and Administration that this happens. This has not been a priority in the past.

Q: Why is transition such an issue with this decision?

A: Transition activities are a key factor in students successfully making the change to middle school. Clinton Township has engaged in some basic transition activities and they have indicated that they are willing to do more. Clinton Public School has provided a transition plan that they developed for our review.

Q: The parent surveys seemed to indicate that more people liked CTMS than not. Why wasn't this considered?

A: The surveys were viewed as a whole. The question regarding satisfaction was viewed in conjunction with the responses to the other questions, as well. In some cases, satisfaction was indicated and the same respondents indicated dissatisfaction in their comments.

Q: How is going from one small school (LBS) to another (CPS) a wise move for our students?

A: Regardless of which school LBS students go to they will be going to a larger school with a middle school philosophy. The students at both middle schools have class changes, activities, sports, and enrichment activities. One difference that is attractive for LBS students at CPS is that they will make up approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{4}$ of their grade levels. This means that their input and involvement in the student body will have much more of an impact than in a larger school.

Q: Have we considered sending the 6th grade to whichever send/receive school we use for our 7th and 8th?

A: This has not been considered. At this point, our 6th-grade students' needs are

being met at LBS. This is not to say that this will never be considered.

Q: If CTMS comes back with a new and improved contract, will it be considered by the BOE?

A: The Lebanon Borough Board of Education will consider all information and offers that are presented.

Q: How was a decision reached based on the information gathered about the 2 schools? (how much weight was put on surveys, school ranking, administrative woes, finances, etc.)

A: All members of the administration and Board of Education make decisions regularly based upon their best judgement using the information that they have at their disposal. To say that there is a specific formula for decision making would be inaccurate. Each person must judge the information they have. A model that I shared with the Board to assist them in deciding is the Kepner-Tregoe model (easiest to Google it). It is fairly involved, but can be modified/simplified to provide insight into decision-making. It essentially asks that the areas of concern be weighted, rated, scored, and compared; however, it is subjective to the individual.

Q: Have you spoken to parents, students, teachers and counselors at NHHS about how well the kids from CTMS and CPS acclimate when going into 9th grade?

A: Mr. Arcurio attends monthly articulation meetings with the superintendents from sending districts to North Hunterdon and Voorhees High Schools. At various meetings, the director of counseling and various teachers from different departments

come to the meetings and have indicated that there is little difference in the transition from most of the sending districts. This includes smaller districts like Hampton, Lebanon Township, and Clinton Public, as well as larger districts like Clinton Township. Parent input has been anecdotal.

Q: If our kids go to Clinton Public will they get the choice to go to North Hunterdon or Voorhees?

A: It has been confirmed with CPS and the Superintendent of NH-V that our students will have the same option as all CPS students to go to either North Hunterdon or Voorhees.

Q: We didn't get to see Clinton Public's presentation, would they be able to come back to present or can we see their slides?

A: Clinton Public's slides are linked in the spreadsheet that was shared in the January newsletter. Clinton Public's Superintendent has indicated that he will come back to do another presentation and has offered to give our parents a tour if they wish to visit.

Q: Can you address issues you have had with CTMS over the years that parents might not be aware of?

A: When we were sharing Business Administrator services in the past they dropped us immediately with little notice. It has been reported that our children are treated differently than in-district students. In the past when Teachers went to professional development in Clinton Township their input was not valued or if offered, disregarded as not important. Lebanon Borough sent a new fee structure for 10 years of tuition payments with set increases each year to the Business

Administrator in Clinton Township in 2015 and it was not considered. Clinton Township reorganized their school district and LBS was not included in the discussion or contacted. LBS administration contacted the superintendent of CTSD at the time and was assured that the change would not affect our children. This is an example of the involvement that has been invited in the past.

Q: Is it possible that this might not happen for the 2019-2020 school year?

A: Yes. This is a possibility. It takes several months to have a feasibility study done and then the Commissioner of Education would have to approve the termination of the contract. There is a very real possibility that this will not be done in time for the coming school year.

Q: Does a contract with Clinton Public School mean less work for the administration of LBS?

A: To the contrary, such a relationship will require a great deal of time and work to develop. It is the goal of the LBS administration and Board to work toward a successful partnership that benefits our students, our district, and our community. It would be less work to continue with the status quo.

Q: What will happen if CPS says they will not transport our students?

A: By law, we are required to pay for and ensure that transportation is provided. This has always been the case. LBS will ensure that transportation for students is arranged.

Q: Is this a financial play on the part of LBS?

A: Finances are always a factor. The Board and Mr. Arcurio are charged with being stewards of the district's funds. We are allowed to budget an increase each year to a 2 % cap. We have traditionally raised to cap. Clinton Township has not over the past 5 years. The closest they've come is 1.5% and one year they only went up by .33%. Our tuition payments on average have increased over 9 %. We continually need to offset our budget to make up the excess tuition costs. It would not be prudent for LBS to continue in this financial reality as it is not sustainable.

Q: Is one of the goals to just get a better contract with CTMS? Is there an expectation that they will give a counter offer for a new contract?

A: That is not the intent, but if we don't get approved to terminate the send/receive relationship, we intend to negotiate. We will certainly consider any offers made by CTSD.

Q: What is our tax rate compared to other districts?

A: We have the lowest tax rate of all surrounding districts and all districts sending to North Hunterdon-Voorhees.

Q: Is Clinton Township Middle School a Blue Ribbon School?

A: Neither school is Blue Ribbon. In the 1999/2000 school year, Round Valley School received a Blue Ribbon School Award, but CTMS has never been named. Round Valley School has been changed

through restructuring over the years and the designation was 19 years ago.

Q: How are presentations a factor?

A: Reaction to presentations is subjective. Mr. Arcurio and the LBS Board did not feel like it was the same level of detail or approach. LB is an intimate place and wonderful place. The group got that same feeling from CPS. There was a focus on the child and environment in the presentation. CPS brought a full team representing various aspects of their middle school. Clinton Township brought 3 people, the presentation spoke about the District and not enough about the middle school.

Q: Did you request that certain staff members from each district come to the presentation? If not, is it fair to judge who each district brought to present.

A: No we did not. They chose who to bring. The LBS Board and administration judged the presentations holistically and who those districts brought to the presentation is one of those components.

Q: Isn't going from small LBS to small CPS to a large high school a negative?

A: If this is truly a concern for some parents, LBS students have the option to select Voorhees High School if we send to CPS. From previous experience in a small school sending to Hunterdon Central, Mr. Arcurio expressed at both sessions that students from small schools expect and develop close connections with their teachers. This does not change because they are in a larger school. Every family will have a different perspective and story on this question, but it is not as simple as saying that going from a smaller school to a larger

school is a bad thing. North Hunterdon-Voorhees has not indicated transition issues from either CPS or CTMS in the past.

Q: How will the relationship be if LBS stays with CTSD after this process?

A: The point of the process has never been to disparage Clinton Township. The hope is that if LBS stays at CTMS, it will be a positive relationship that is even better than the present one..

Q: What is the key driver for sending the letter of intent to end the relationship with CTSD? What was the genesis of the events?

A: This has been considered previously, LBS was approached by another district with the idea and we invited them to do a presentation on their school. Financial drivers are a factor adding to it. Our current rate of tuition is \$17,488 per student (still awaiting the expected tuition adjustment increase). This is not negotiable under our current contract. The LBS Board and administration felt it was worthwhile to investigate and ultimately take these steps.

Q: Have we considered moving 6th grade to CTMS?

A: We have not considered that because we feel that the kids are getting what they need here. We enjoy our small community and we have not wanted to send out the 6th grade. Historically it has been the d 7th and 8th grade only. If the Board or administration determines that this would be

in the best interest of the students, we will certainly consider all possibilities.

Q: Is there a concern that CPS will not be able to handle all of our students over time?

A: This has not been a concern, but will be addressed in the feasibility study.

Q: What are the current transition efforts to CTMS?

A: We could definitely work together more. A counselor comes to LBS to talk with the students, we send them for a move up day where they have a bus ride to the school and eat lunch there. Our students get invited to a dance and parents are invited to a parent night.

Q: Is there a risk of CTMS deciding to end our relationship?

A: It is unlikely as they have indicated that they wish to keep our students, but, if so they could go through the same process that we are now.

Q: Will the property values change if we change schools and what say do the taxpayers have in this?

A: This is not something that is easy to answer. There is no information that would indicate that they would increase or decrease if we switched to CPS. Both CPS and

CTMS are good schools so quality of school should not be a factor.

Q: How is the money saved going to impact the kids in this school?

A: Any money saved through a new relationship could be used to offset rising costs and/or potentially add new programs to LBS.

Q: Have you considered that CPS is upselling themselves?

A: Absolutely. That is why we have done research to determine if there is validity to their claims and offerings. We have done this and feel comfortable with their assertions.

Q: Where did the kids go before CTMS? Why did we change?

A: Our 7th and 8th grade students went to CPS prior to the 1982 school year. We looked at the minutes of Board meetings from that time and only found that transportation *could* have been an issue.

Q: Is the LBS-CTSD contract finished at the end of this year?

A: It is possible but the contract cannot be ended unless the NJ Commissioner of Education allows it. This means that it is in effect until June 30th of whatever school year the Commissioner decides it can end, if he does so.