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RICHARD A. SIMON
Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Community Members:

Over the past few weeks I have received a number of emails and phone calls related to the Board of Education decision to close Westbrook and Kirdahy elementary schools next year. The individuals have raised a number of questions as well as made certain assumptions. The following points address many of the major issues from your emails and letters.

The decision to close two elementary schools, rather than one elementary school and a middle school was, I believe, a good decision. Specifically, while the one elementary school and one middle school option would have saved the most money, it also would have been significantly more disruptive to the educational process and experience of students. Moving the sixth graders into the elementary schools, which would be required to make this option work, would have necessitated changes and modifications to the academic program, including the elimination of certain sixth grade courses. In addition, combining the 7th and 8th graders into one school would have substantially reduced co-curricular and athletic opportunities. Finally, redistricting would have been necessary more than once, as continuing decline in elementary enrollment would have made it necessary to close one of the remaining five K-6 buildings in the near future.

I also believe the Board of Education members shared their reasoning in the vote which resulted in the closing of Westbrook and Kirdahy beginning next year. After considering the enrollment projections and consulting with the administration and me, the Board determined that the four remaining buildings would accommodate our elementary students while maintaining class size, and without sacrificing important classroom space used for art and music. In addition, the Board made clear during the process that portable classrooms would not be utilized. In short, the Board believed the options were equal educationally, so they looked ahead and felt that in the long-term Westbrook had more potential to generate revenue for the district. Given the reductions in state aid and mandatory increases in pension and healthcare contributions, other new unfunded mandates over the past two years, and the extraordinary pressures all districts face under the new tax levy cap, this revenue will be critical to maintain the educational program as we move forward.

The process that led to the Board of Education decision was one of transparency and full disclosure. The Board listened to the many speakers at meetings over the last five months, as well as carefully considered the report of the Study Group and the extensive documentation that was included. I am confident that the Board made every attempt to objectively consider what is best for the district both educationally and fiscally.

Sincerely,



Richard Simon