

A Plan to Integrate Roosevelt and Bellmore-Merrick Schools

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There is a solution to the problem of Roosevelt schools, a solution that will improve the education of its children and create a model integrated school district on Long Island. The only issue is whether New York State and the people of Nassau County will demonstrate the necessary political will to put it into affect.

It is almost a half century since a United States Supreme Court 1954 decision declared that separate but equal schools could never provide equal educational opportunity. Yet most children on Long Island continue to attend racially segregated schools.

We believe that New York State should merge the Roosevelt School District with its neighbors in Merrick and Bellmore, which already have a consolidated secondary school district. A new Roosevelt-Bellmore-Merrick District (R-M-B) would have approximately 10,500 students and would be very diverse. Approximately 70% of its students would be white. Blacks, including African American and Caribbean students, would make up 25% of the student body. The remaining five percent would Hispanic and Asian.

For the merger to work New York State would have to agree to provide resources to insure that the R-M-B district was funded at levels comparable to the highest in Nassau County. All children in the new consolidated district would benefit from this increased funding. In 1998, the Roosevelt School District spent \$6,123 per regular education student on instructional expenditures. The three Bellmore-Merrick districts spent \$8,165. However, Great Neck, Manhasset, Jericho, and Oyster Bay, the highest spending districts in Nassau County, spent over \$10,000 per regular education student on instructional expenditures.

The additional money would provide the academic support services needed to insure that all students performed at or above state standards. Bellmore-Merrick high schools already have excellent passing and mastery level rates on standardized state exams. There is no reason that these cannot continue after the merger. However, an effort will have to be made to detrack classes and avoid creating separate schools-within-schools.

The money would also fund the extra-curricular and school-based programs needed to bridge gaps of race, class and ethnicity and create a truly integrated educational experience for all children. This is a crucial component of any consolidation plan. Without it schools desegregate, but students do not learn to live together.

Many details would have to be worked out to make the merger successful. Parents, teachers, students and communities would have to work hard to bridge differences and build new connections. Teachers will have to be assured tenure protection and job security in new placements.

Unfortunately, these changes will only happen if they are mandated by the state government. If people from any of the communities think they can avoid change, they will try to delay it until it dies.

We propose that starting in Fall 2002, students graduating from Roosevelt elementary schools would enter one of the Bellmore-Merrick middle schools. Students graduating from Roosevelt Middle School would enter a Bellmore-Merrick high school. Starting in Fall, 2004 or 2005, Roosevelt High School could be reopened as a consolidated magnet school for the entire Roosevelt-Bellmore-Merrick School District. At least at the start, elementary school and pre-kindergarten children would remain in local schools.

We believe State Education Commissioner Richard Mills was bluffing when he threatened to close the Roosevelt School District. It is time to call his bluff. Saving the children of Roosevelt does not mean saving the school district. It is time to save the children.

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Proposal: Starting in Fall 2002, Students graduating from Roosevelt Elementary school would enter middle school in Bellmore-Merrick. Students graduating from Roosevelt Middle School would enter Bellmore-Merrick high schools. Starting in Fall, 2004 or 2005, Roosevelt HS would be reopened as a consolidated magnet school for the entire Bellmore-Merrick-Roosevelt School District. New York State would agree to provide resources to insure that the Bellmore-Merrick-Roosevelt School District was funded at levels comparable to the highest in Nassau County.

Student Populations (1998)

District	Students	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Roosevelt	2730	0.3% (8)	90.8% (2479)	8.9% (243)	0.1% (3)
Bellmore-Merrick	4832	93.3% (4508)	1.4% (68)	2.5% (120)	2.8% (123)
Bellmore	1136	96.7% (1099)	0.4% (5)	1.5% (17)	1.4% (16)
Merrick	1824	96.4% (1758)	0.5% (9)	1.0% (18)	2.0% (36)
Total B-M	7792	94.5% (7365)	1.0% (82)	2.0% (155)	2.2% (175)
Consolidated	10522	70.0% (7373)	24.3% (2561)	3.8% (398)	1.7% (178)

