

Eugene H. Frost, Chairman, School Study Committee  
2112 Black Point Road  
Ticonderoga, New York 12883

August 28, 2004

Dear Board of Directors & Fellow Members,

The School Study Committee of The Lake Communities of Putnam was organized in August of 2003 to learn more about our school district in order to have a better appreciation of just how our tax dollars are being spent in the all important endeavor of educating the children of our township. The committee was made up of three people, myself, a Director of this organization residing on Black Point Road, Mrs. Kathleen Hild, a member of our organization, a summer resident of Black Point Road and a long time school teacher from the Town of Smithtown, Long Island and Joseph Buychn, also a member of LCP, a summer resident of Gull Bay, an attorney, whose practice was heavily involved with the Schenectady, New York School District.

This Committee met last summer and together drafted a long list of questions we felt we needed answered in order to learn everything we could about the Putnam Central School District. This list of questions were presented to School Superintendent Kent Cauley at a meeting the committee had with Mr. Cauley last fall.

It is no secret that the Putnam Central School District has one of the highest costs per student in the State of New York. Having said that I must add that that statement alone does not tell the entire story. This cost per student is driven higher than surrounding school districts mostly due to the fact that Putnam has so few students. There were forty students in grades K-6 and another six in pre-K. There were about 42 more in grades 7-12 who are enrolled on a tuition basis in the Ticonderoga, New York School District. An additional 13 students attend St. Mary's School in Ticonderoga.

In absolute fairness to the School Board, and The Putnam School Superintendent, when you compare Putnam's school tax rate per thousand to surrounding school districts Putnam and the Putnam School Board appear to have done a great job of educating our children at a reasonable cost. The decision to tuition students for grades 7-12 has unquestionably saved Putnam residents a great deal of expense.

We live in an age when consolidation of school districts is happening all over the country. Sometimes this is not the best route to follow. We have only to look at the situation in Hague to know that in a consolidation our cost can go up instead of down.

So what is the answer? Everyone is feeling the pinch of high taxes, especially in upstate New York where rate-ables are few, state mandates are many, and Medicaid demands are high. For lake side property owners, the suggestion to rent your home in the summer, rent dock space, or worse yet take a home equity loan or a reverse mortgage to pay our taxes is both insulting and unacceptable.

There's another aspect to this cruel phenomena that is not being adequately considered by our township neighbors. Putnam's farms are also commanding higher prices than ever. What will happen to the assessed values of these farmsteads after the old Sears Farm with only 25 acres sells for over \$500 Thousand (Asking price now is \$695K)? Sales like that will surely demand much higher assessments on the townships interior parcels. Recent sales would indicate that assessments on interior parcels could double.

Since we live in a state where we are unable to secure a proposition on our state ballot capping our tax increases like many other states notably, California and South Carolina what is the answer? Will our state representatives push for such a proposition? We should demand that they do. The STAR program just doesn't do it. All of its savings are eaten up by the never-ending double-digit tax increases!

Can we save more on our school taxes? Could we maintain our school board and superintendent and tuition all of our children to Ticonderoga at a present cost that is about \$7000 a year per student *less* than we are spending now? Could we privatize our school system? Could we offer vouchers and let parents decide? All of these options deserve to be explored.

More importantly is what were doing today the best education we can provide for our children? It seems the largest class is six or seven students and the smallest only one. Do our children benefit from this? What was it that drove our school board to send these children to Ticonderoga at grade 7 versus grade nine or grade 1?

Obviously, this is a very complex issue. The people of the township of Putnam must decide the answer. Could we have a local question put on our next ballot that says something like this? ***"Would you be in favor of sending our children presently in grades k-6 to the Ticonderoga, New York School on a tuition basis, if this would save you approximately 30% on your annual school taxes? The Putnam School Board and The Superintendent with secretarial staff would continue to exist."*** This is not a consolidation of school districts.

The School building if this were to happen could become Town Offices and a Community Center. It would not be vacant.

This committee has more work to accomplish yet for now we would like to conclude that consolidation at present does not appear to be a viable alternative. It is also apparent that the present school board and notably superintendent Cauley, has done a great job considering the task presented them and deserve our support. Surely their assistance and cooperation is imperative if we are to uphold the highest level of results while maintaining the most reasonable cost. This committee thanks Superintendent Cauley for his time, courtesy and direct responses to all of our questions. We will continue to inform our board and members as issues develop and we welcome your questions and feedback.

Respectfully Submitted,

E H Frost