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Ontario County considers school overhaul

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Ontario County school leaders are searching for ways to save money and provide greater opportunities to high school students, which might include a new secondary school system.

On Tuesday, about 200 people, including many teachers and district administrators, gathered in the library at Finger Lakes Community College for a presentation on the preliminary findings from a study of the topic.

Jaime Saunders and Kirstin Pryor, staffers from the Center for Governmental Research, which was hired to investigate the issue, explained two scenarios.

One plan, aimed at improving academic and extracurricular offerings to more students would establish five high schools, instead of the current nine. A second possibility, with similar academic goals while reducing travel time, would establish six schools.

The first model would require about \$20 million in new construction. The second would require about \$31.6 million in new construction.

A reduction in staff could save more than \$4 million per year, which would translate into a property-tax reduction of about \$50 annually on a \$100,000 house.

Joseph Marinelli, superintendent of the Wayne-Finger Lakes Board of Cooperative Educational Services, said schools are searching for ways to deal with less state aid, rising performance expectations, a property-tax cap without mandate relief and declining enrollments.

Conceivably, a new regional high school district, with its own school board and administration, would balance out differences in

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academic and extracurricular offerings, while districts would operate programs for kindergarten through eighth grade.

Lynne Gochenaur, a counselor at Marcus Whitman High School in Gorham, saw promise in the ideas raised.

"I'm very interested. I'm not opposed to looking at a system that might provide more resources for students," she said.

Another presentation is scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday in the Main Scandling Center on the campus of Hobart and William Smith [Colleges](#) in Geneva.

High School students also will be surveyed before a final report is delivered in March.

Marinelli and the CGR researchers emphasized that the study was speculative and no action is required once the report is done. Many steps, including state legislation, would be required before a regional high school district could be created.

"We're just looking at alternatives for what high schools could look like," Saunders said.

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