

# TWO SCHOOLS COULD CLOSE

## Northport-East Northport vote set for Thursday

BY JOIE TYRRELL  
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The Northport-East Northport school district is proposing to close two elementary schools to address declining enrollment but parents at a hearing Tuesday night urged school board members to rethink the plan.

The Board of Education may vote Thursday on whether to close the Bellerose Avenue and Dickinson Avenue elementary schools, according to a notice on the district's website.

Board members and district officials heard from residents in-person and online during the hearing and at a rally planned for earlier Tuesday.

Parents want the district to pause the decision saying they are concerned about overcrowded classes and safety considerations due to the pandemic. One parent asked for them to wait at least a year.

Parent Nicole Richichi, who has two children in the district, one in kindergarten and a third-grader, said that given all children have gone through this past



A rally in Northport Tuesday against plans to close two schools.

year dealing with COVID-19, the district should delay making such a big change.

"We don't know the long-term effects of COVID on a child's mental health or social and emotional well-being, and taking kids from their home schools and pushing them into another school is going to be isolating for them," said Richichi, 39, of East Northport.

Closing Bellerose and Dickinson would move the district to a K-4, 5-8 and 9-12 model, with students from the closed buildings being rezoned to the remaining four elementary schools, and fifth-graders leaving their elementary schools one year ear-

lier. If approved, the new configuration would start in the fall, district officials said.

The district now has six elementary schools serving grades K-5, two middle schools for grades 6-8, and the high school. Bellerose, built in 1966, and Dickinson, built in 1956, enroll 274 and 369 students, respectively.

Richichi, a clinical social worker, said she is concerned about an early transition for fifth-graders to middle school.

"Many children at fifth grade are not ready to go into middle school — it is just too soon," she said. "Why are they planning to put such a rush on all of this?"

According to a report on the

### WHAT TO KNOW

- The Board of Education is expected to vote Thursday on whether to close the Bellerose Avenue and Dickinson Avenue elementary schools.
- The district estimates closing the two campuses will save more than \$71 million.
- Parents and other opponents have raised concerns about possible overcrowded conditions at remaining schools in the aftermath because of the pandemic.

retirement incentive this school year to eligible teachers, the report read. Banzner said the district does not anticipate any layoffs of teaching staff, and that about 60 staffers have taken the retirement package districtwide.

"These concerns and rising costs have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent settlement of certain tax certiorari proceedings brought by the Long Island Power Authority [LIPA] and others against the Town of Huntington concerning the assessed value of the Northport Power Plant, which is located within district boundaries," read the report.

LIPA contended the town overassessed the plant's property value for years and LIPA was paying far more in property taxes than it should have. The settlement reduced the amount of property taxes LIPA will pay the town and school district going forward.

The public hearing started at 7 p.m. at Northport High School's auditorium with a presentation on the proposal by Banzner who noted that the proposal would also mean additional academic opportunities for children such as an expanded STEM program. The board also was expected to discuss other potential uses for the schools.

# State funds to help replace septic systems

BY CANDICE FERRETTE  
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State funding of \$2 million will help Nassau County provide up to \$10,000 in grants for homeowners and small businesses seeking to replace failing septic systems, Nassau County Executive Laura Curran said Tuesday.

New septic systems will help in Nassau's effort to reduce nitrogen and other pollutants, Curran said at a news conference in Port Washington.

"We all know that malfunctioning septic systems are one of the leading causes of groundwater pollution on our beautiful island and one of the leading sources of surface water pollution," Curran said at North Hempstead Beach



Nassau Executive Laura Curran

Park. "The goal here is to remove nitrogen from our waterways and give our environment a chance to regenerate, bringing back cleaner, healthier bays for wildlife, shellfishers, fisherman and residents alike."

Applications for the county's SEPTIC program will open Mon-

### WHAT TO KNOW

#### Septic grant program

Eligibility criteria includes:

- Residences must be single family, owner-occupied and a property owner's primary residence.
- The residence/small business must be served by a septic system or cesspool and not connected to a sewer system or located within a proposed sewer district.

- Grant recipients may not be a current employee of Nassau County, an elected official of the State of New York or a party officer.
- Property does not have any outstanding or open real property tax liens.
- There must be a valid certificate of occupancy or equivalent.

day. The grants are for 50% of the cost of a new state-of-the-art nitrogen-reducing septic system, up to \$10,000, Curran said.

Officials said about 200 homes are expected to benefit

from the program. Applications will remain open indefinitely but after the first 200 are received, the county will start a wait list. There is no income threshold for applicants, officials said.

Tens of thousands of homes and small businesses along the North Shore of Nassau County are currently served by cesspools and septic systems. About 90% of Nassau is on a public sewer system, Curran said.

Septic system failure contributes to toxic algae blooms and the suffocation of aquatic life. Reversing the pollution will depend on the new on-site wastewater treatment systems designed to remove nitrogen.

Qualifying residents can contact [SepticReplace@nassaucountyny.gov](mailto:SepticReplace@nassaucountyny.gov) or call 516-364-5861 for more information and instructions on how to apply.

Applications can be filled out online at [NassauCountyNY.gov/SepticReplace](http://NassauCountyNY.gov/SepticReplace) starting Monday.