

RCTA Newsletter

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What YOU Should Know and Why Rochester Fire Department School Inspection Report

On Monday, March 29, Fire Marshal Mark Dupuis spoke before the RCTA regarding the inspections conducted of our schools. The code followed is found in the Life Safety Code Handbook. The state currently is using code published in 2003.

While most of us can agree after reading the report that what is listed is basic housekeeping and should be done on a set schedule by the custodial staff or those employed as skilled maintenance.

Many questions have been raised as to why our schools have been allowed to fall into such a state of noncompliance/disrepair. These are the buildings where we send our children, our precious commodity.

There are many remedies to the problems facing our School Department, but it seems that all those we have put in charge of our children, those with the great educations, those supposedly elected by us to oversee the proper expenditure of our tax money, cannot think outside the box. One has to

wonder if they can even find the box they need to think outside of. They worry about the inconvenience it may pose to the parents.

First and foremost, the students in the lower grades are oblivious as to the failings their current school may have.

As enrollment declines further and further is it wise for us to be putting money into buildings that have outlived their usefulness? The thought of putting more money into Maple Street and Nancy Loud is unconscionable. Both schools house K-3. Though there is a certain convenience to those schools, hard choices need to be made during difficult economic times. Maybe the time has come to shut those two schools down, consolidate and take some of the burden off the taxpayer.

Maple Street School supports approximately 66 children with a staff of 25. This is poor management in good economic times, but even more in hard economic times. The students of this school would benefit from

attending a larger school. They would benefit from increased socialization, larger libraries and greater resources. Yes, we may lose some staff, but we cannot afford to maintain the same level of staffing as we did years ago when enrollment was up, this for only four classrooms.

In the last two school years, the School Department has eliminated the 4th grade at Maple Street and 5th grade at School Street due to low enrollment. Now they are having discussions as to how to fix things so as to be in compliance with the Fire Marshal Report and the only thing they can come up with is hiring an architect and spending money we do not have. Any fix will not be a "quick" fix.

Is the School Department willing to give up thoughts of the Big Step Forward (anyway you look at it the 4th high school), a dream that could and probably will cost the taxpayers millions of dollars in order to keep the current number of schools and all the staff on the payroll? Currently it appears that they do not want to spend a dime on what we as taxpayers already

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support in an effort to push through the Big Step Forward.

As the communities surrounding Rochester are having to "bite the bullet" and cut their budgets in an effort to save the taxpayer additional burdens, this seems to be a concept that is foreign to the Rochester School Board. Most of these communities do not have a Tax and Spending Cap to blame the cuts on. It is known throughout the region that the budget for the Rochester schools is very bloated and there are very little in the way of results.

The time has come to make the School Department and the City Council understand that we are not able to support dreams that do not produce results for our children.