

EDUCATION

Urban-Suburban debate unruly in Spencerport

Shouted interruptions, accusations raise tensions

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— If the atmosphere at the second public hearing on Urban-Suburban was any indication, the school board's upcoming decision will be deeply unpopular one way or the other.

Over several hours of scheduled speakers and an open forum, a moderator repeatedly had to remind the audience — mostly those in opposition — not to yell from their seats. There were shouted interruptions, accusations and a suggestion: "Move to Rochester!"

The opposition crystallized around the fact that the program, whose stated purpose is to reduce racial segregation, does not allow white city students.

"There's no reason you should exclude (white) people from the City School District as well," said Scott Seely, the father of a third-grader and a youth baseball and soccer coach. "I'm not saying the program doesn't have its merits, but it's 50 years old. It's time to update it."

At the first hearing on the question in December, the

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Spencerport School Superintendent Mike Crumb explains his proposal for an Urban-Suburban project in his school district.

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Debate

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majority of attendees were against the program. Those in favor turned out in larger numbers Tuesday and were buttressed by a series of scheduled speakers who had experience with the program in other districts.

All those people, as well as several Spencerport teachers, spoke in favor of the program. The Spencerport teachers and administrators unions both have endorsed the program. Those in opposition seemed more motivated by philosophical concerns.

Darius Melvin is a former Urban-Suburban student who graduated from Brighton High School in 2006, then worked for several years in China after college. He credited his time at Brighton with "prepar(ing) me to deal with people who don't look like me."

"If Urban-Suburban doesn't come to Spencerport, it's not the Urban-Suburban students I'll feel sorry for," he said. "Those kids are going to be OK. I'm more concerned about the students of Spencerport who won't have the opportunity to build those relationships with people who don't look like them. ... Do you really want to look them in the face when it's time for them to graduate and know you didn't give them the greatest opportunity to succeed in this global economy?"

The school board is scheduled to make its decision at its Feb. 24 meeting. School board President William Sweeney and member Michael Zale declined to say which way they're leaning on the question.

If the program is adopted, the district would take in 18 total students in first, second and sixth grades in the fall, based on building space, Superintendent Michael Crumb said.

East Rochester and Hilton school district leaders have both expressed strong interest in bringing the program there, and Webster is considering it as well.

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Darius Melvin is a 2006 graduate from Brighton High School and was part of the Urban-Suburban program there. He is now a successful businessman.

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