

*For immediate release
Monday, June 25, 2012*

Owego Apalachin Has Received Notice That FEMA Officials Have Begun Process To Fund OES Reconstruction Effort

OWEGO – In his commencement address Saturday, June 23, Dr. Bill Russell, Owego Apalachin superintendent, shared news with those in attendance that the school district has been notified by Federal Emergency Management Agency representatives that official action has begun toward funding a new elementary school to replace Owego Elementary, which was badly damaged by September 2011's flood waters.

Dr. Russell received the long-awaited news last week that Phillip Parr, the FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer responsible for disaster recovery related to Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee, had directed that the project worksheets - which detail the scope of damage to the elementary school – be entered into the FEMA system and sent on for approval at the federal level.

“FEMA’s conclusion essentially signals that they are moving forward to commit the funding necessary to replace Owego Elementary School,” said Dr. Russell. “Their project worksheet states that we are entitled to a new school to replace the badly damaged OES. This is terrific news for OA and for our community.”

Dr. Russell added that early indications are that FEMA would prefer a replacement school at the current OES site, which would require architects and engineers to design a building that is above the 500-year flood plain elevation. If that plan proves unfeasible, the district could apply to relocate a new school to a site that is out of the flood plain altogether.

He also said that negotiations with FEMA are ongoing regarding the district’s maintenance facility and the maintenance storage garage, as well as the district’s main offices at 36 Talcott Street, all of which were substantially damaged by 6 to 7 feet of flood water.

“At this stage, we have strong signals from FEMA that those facilities will be replaced or relocated,” Dr. Russell said.

Earlier this month, U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer announced that, at his urging, FEMA planned to fund the replacement of OA’s flood-ridden facilities. After learning of major FEMA obstacles along OA’s path toward recovery, in April and May, Schumer summoned FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate to his Washington D.C. office, asking him to end the delays in the OA district. He relayed to Fugate that five of OA’s seven

buildings were damaged during Tropical Storm Lee, four of which had been rendered uninhabitable.

Since the storm flooded our region last September, Tioga County was deemed eligible for FEMA Public Assistance. A team of local experts, including engineers and architects and many other specialists and consultants, then assessed OA's damage and cost for repairs. After four months of this work, the district's team of experts submitted its cost analysis to a FEMA Public Assistance Team that reviewed and validated the work.

However, that team was replaced by a different group of FEMA officials that imposed additional requirements, such as repeated requests for documentation of damage to buildings, which only extended the timeline for repairs.

But after Schumer's meeting with Fugate, the senator announced that FEMA planned to fund the replacement of OA's facilities.

"I am pleased that FEMA has stepped up to the plate and removed the major roadblocks in the way of Tioga County and the Owego Apalachin school district's recovery efforts from Tropical Storm Lee," said Schumer, in a June 5 press release. "In my meeting last month with FEMA Administrator Fugate in Washington, I urged him to help address this particularly troubling situation in Tioga County, in which FEMA's slow response and attention to repair projects was putting the Owego Apalachin School District rebuilding efforts at a standstill."

That announcement, said Schumer in his release, meant that "FEMA has heeded that call, and local residents, parents, teachers and students can rest assured that they are a step closer toward the replacement of their school facilities. I will continue to be an advocate for the district and county's recovery efforts.

"After disaster strikes," Schumer continued in that release, "it's the federal government's obligation to help local communities repair and rebuild local infrastructure, and this coordinated effort to move this public service project forward does just that. I appreciate FEMA's efforts and look forward to working with them to rebuild Owego Apalachin school district's facilities."

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