

## O-A district closer to replacing Owego Elementary School

OWEGO -- The Owego-Apalachin school district is making headway on replacing Owego Elementary School, which was inundated by Tropical Storm Lee in September.

Superintendent William Russell received word last week that the Federal Emergency Management Agency official responsible for the disaster recovery had directed the project worksheets -- which document the scope of damage -- be entered into the FEMA system and sent on for federal approval.

"FEMA's conclusion essentially signals that they are moving forward to commit the funding necessary to replace Owego Elementary School," Russell said during Saturday's commencement at Owego Free Academy.

Tropical Storm Lee devastated Tioga County, prompting more than 300 public assistance projects totaling \$30 million. Five of the district's seven buildings were badly damaged and four rendered uninhabitable, including the elementary school, the administration building on Talcott Street, its maintenance building and the Elm Street storage facility.

Most OES students spent the school year at

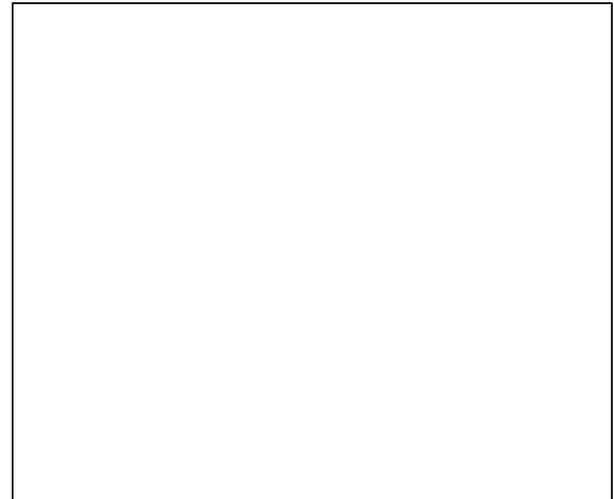
Union-Endicott's Linnaeus West School.

The documentation stated that the district is entitled to a new school, according to Russell. Early indications are that FEMA would prefer to replace OES on its current site off Sheldon L. Guile Boulevard, which would require architects and engineers to design a facility above the 500-year-flood plain elevation. If that's unworkable, OA could apply to relocate the school to a site outside of the flood plain.

Negotiations are still ongoing regarding the maintenance facility, storage garage at the Talcott Street offices, all of which sustained 6 to 7 feet of flood water.

The remediation process was fraught with hold-ups. After five months of research, a team of local experts submitted its cost analysis of the damage and estimated repairs to a FEMA team that reviewed and validated the work. But that team was later replaced by a different group of FEMA officials who imposed additional tests and repeatedly challenged the district's

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damage estimates.

In May, U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer met with FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate to speed up several flood recovery projects snagged by bureaucratic holdups and highlighted the district's plight.

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