**Upper Darby School Budget Forum**

**Moderator Report**

**Group #1**

**Drexel Hill Middle School - 3.10.13**

**Moderator Terrill Thompson and Gwynne Scheffer**

The composition of Group 1 was 23 White females, 11 White males, one African American female and one Asian female for a total of 36 participants. The groups self identified as follows: eight students (current or former), 23 parents (current or former), 15 district employees (primarily teaching staff), one community organization, one concerned citizen, and 27 property owners. This was a very large group but participants were very respectful and considerate of each other’s varying perspectives on the issues.

**Low Hanging Fruit**

#33a Eliminate 9th grade sports

* Eliminate 9th grade sports and reduction in coaching staff by 40%
  + There are other sports opportunities in the community
  + We’re sacrificing the basics for student activities (#s 32, 33, and 34)
    - Personnel and equipment needed during the day in school for after school which is a luxury, e.g., school sports v. social worker
  + Weighted against other choices, we need other ideas such as activity fees and dollars from the community
    - Affordability is an issue as kids who can ‘t pay will lose out
    - Clubs don’t get scholarships
      * UDHS football is the biggest program and those kids don’t get scholarships either
      * Possibility is not a valid argument since no Division 1 or 2 colleges awarded scholarships to UD students
    - Don’t want to turn turning high school sports into club sports
  + Extracurricular activities make students want to be in school
    - Not just studying all the time
    - Academic work then nothing else to excel in
    - Played sports in HS
      * 9th grade can do without learning how to play sports
    - Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)
      * Kids involved in extracurricular activities perform better but ok with #33a

#32a Reduce middle school sports to 8th grade only

* Have a thriving lead sport association with scholarships available in the community
* Nationwide obesity problem therefore we need sports
  + It’s small in comparison to the larger issue
* Children need to be well rounded
* Get this in gym class during the day
* Physically active kids participate in sports anyway
* Public school is in business to educate therefore gym, art and music is included
  + All kids can’t participate in sports

#19a Reduce Instruction and Curriculum staff by 5%

* Initial proposition was to cut by 10% and take on more responsibilities
  + Suggesting teacher cuts = administrative cuts too
  + Have reduced supervision
  + Agreed but should be 5%
* Special education populations is large and the department is already overwhelmed
  + 650 students in elementary, middle and high school
    - Paperwork for state and federal - who would take this over

#35b Raise property taxes up to index plus partial approved exceptions of 4% (up to 1.31 mil)

* Public education = public good
* Cut everything from school we’re going to have low PSSA scores
* Not raising taxes would impact the other choices negatively
* Increase in special education costs
  + Try to capture special education costs
* Nobody wants to go up to 2.76mil but at least 1.97
* Everybody is already living paycheck to paycheck
  + Local, state and federal taxes
  + UD is not rich
* Agree to 1.97 since my children are in district
  + Pay into tax base v. private school for my children
* Perverse result, already paying 10K in taxes and just furloughed from federal position
  + Nobody is talking about furloughing teachers
* Reach a point of decreasing returns
  + Property assessment down, e.g., $325K now work $250K and taxes are up
  + Debt spiral
* State mandate to balance the budget
  + We’re all in t his together
  + Taxes are going up

***The service areas rejected during our discussion:***

#1a/b Reduce elementary school regular education staff through attrition/increasing classroom size

* Don’t want taxes raised
* Increasing class size from 21 to 24 is not a big jump; we had 31 in a class when we went to school
* Highland already has 26 in a classroom
* Increasing behavioral issues so 30 is not feasible
* Thirty-one in a classroom a couple of years ago is not today; different times what kids bring to the table
* Want to be the best possible district that can attract new people (taxpayers)
* Larger class size won’t attract new residence
* Twenty-six students with some of the issues they deal with means behavior problems and issues such learning, inclusion, special education
  + Impact performance and test scores which will impact funding
* Lower grades need small group instructions
  + Larger class size means less time for all students
* There are other solutions that could be used rather than attrition
  + Put other mechanisms in place rather than a one to one such as opportunities for movement
  + Save money on a senior person by replacing the position with a junior person

The group voted in all four categories but there were not enough votes to place in either of the four.

#s1a, 4a and 7 referencing reduction through attrition was proposed. #1a was taken off the table since it was discussed earlier and the focus remained on #s 4a and 7.

* Less people = less hands on = less safety
* Schools already crowded
  + Concerns about the quality of education being received
* With attrition does this mean no one gets hired for a low paid get hired
* We need bodies, attrition eliminates positions
* Alternatives to attrition since financial impact may not be as great
  + Step 1 teacher with 30 years of experience v. Step 1 teacher brand new to teaching and the district
* Comparing public education to corporate America is not the same
* Hiring aides/assistants are lower cost than teachers
* Bodies = small class size

Vote on 4a and 7 but not enough votes for Low Hanging Fruit. Second vote moved to Gut Wrenchers,

It was proposed that #37 fund balance should be used up to $3.0 million.

* All options should be a No Way No How.
* Kicking the can down the road
* Reduce credit rating
* No reserve balance = no dollars
* Playing with fire, dangerous, dead in the water
* Opening up for emergency tax increases
* State department of education has a new law monitoring fiscal health of school districts
  + Risk a state takeover and be like Chester/Upland
* Business manager recommended $2.0 million in a January 30th presentation and he also suggested raising taxes
* Sidebar
  + People hired in the district, political hires, largest salaries in the district
* What’s the impact of sequestration impact on the fund balance

Vote on 3 was defeated. Went through all levels and using $1 million became a Gut Wrencher.

**No Way, No Hows**

#1c Eliminate kindergarten

* Kindergarten parent last year and will be again next year
  + Really helped her son
* Most struggle without kindergarten experience
* I’m a mom and have to do my job at home but it would be a major downfall
* First grade teacher sees huge difference in performance
  + Those without kindergarten drain services
* Kindergarten center is two hours of kindergarten
  + No other program matches to the foundation acquired here, not day care or certified kindergarten
  + Need AM and PM because both parents are working in the household
  + All three kids went through kindergarten
  + Difference between nursery and kindergarten
* Should the district pay for a non-mandated program
* Kindergarten is all academic, it’s work
* Students population with no academic and social skills learned in kindergarten will impact on all grades if they come to school behind in first grade
* PSSA years impact on reading specialists
* 60 kids in ELL program
* Is there an alternative that the district wouldn’t have to pay for
* Vouchers provided by district for certified kindergarten
* Bring kindergarten back to the home schools
  + Save money on bussing
* Private bussing (contract out)

**Shared Pain**

#28 Reduce transportation by 5%

* Anybody of 50 years of age use to walk to school
* Special education and little children should be bussed
* Alternatives like walking or Septa
* Philadelphia provides free transpass
  + State/Septa arrangement
* If transportation was not provided, we’d be on the new consistently
  + Safety concerns for middle and high school students

#2 Eliminate lead teachers in elementary school

* Initially proposed that #s 2, 5 and 8 be considered
  + Serve in similar roles
  + Primary focus is discipline
  + If other people can step in, it’s not that much pain
  + Responsibilities go back to the classroom teacher
* Mixed perspectives on the role
  + Lead same as Assistant Principal
    - HS Assistant Principal works on curriculum not discipline
    - Lead supports the “good” kids
  + Old model was Dean for each grade, four counselors and six disciplinarians
* Parents need to take on additional responsibilities
* Almost 4K students in the high school (only two votes for #8)

#5 Eliminate lead teachers in middle school

***Discussion under #2 above***

The service areas rejected during our discussion:

There was a brief discussion on the need to reduce administrative staff. One suggestion would be to have volunteers support re-registration to keep people from out of district using their services.

**Gut Wrenchers**

#4 Reduce middle school teaching staff by five through attrition

***Discussion captured under Low Hanging Fruit rejections.***

#7 Reduce high school teaching staff by 10 through attrition

***Discussion captured under Low Hanging Fruit rejections***

#37 Fund balance

***Discussion captured under Low Hanging Fruit rejections***

**GRAND TOTAL – 77 POINTS**