**Upper Darby School Budget Forum**

 **Moderator Report**

**Group #3**

**Drexel Hill Middle School - 3.10.13**

**Moderator Susan Tyler and Ellen Greenberg**

36 participants: They were a mix of parents of children (2) in the Upper Darby School District, employees of the school district, students and taxpayers (with no children in Upper Darby schools). The group was made up of mostly white men and women. There were two African American Women, one African American man and one African American child. In addition to the participants, there were 3 student observers from Penn. As the evening progressed, approximately 4 people left before the session was over.

We gave the group a few minutes to go over the worksheet and indicate if they had any items that they would categorize as “Low Hanging Fruit” or “No Way, No How’s.” We then split the group into four small groups, gave each group a section of the worksheet to discuss and asked them to share with the larger group what they came up with in terms of Low Hanging Fruit. We opened each item up for a group discussion on the pro’s and con’s of their suggestions and then moved to a vote on each item. The results and accompanying discussion are below.

The group expressed the following as issues to look at and/or areas of concern:

* Look at the redundancies that exist in staffing, especially in administration
* Where is the township in all of this – why aren’t businesses building revenue?
* Closing kindergarten is not an option

**LOW HANGING FRUIT:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Item/Service Area** | **Points** |
| **1. Elementary Classroom Teachers -** Over 75% of the group agreed on this item | 9 |
| **Discussion:****Supporting Arguments*** One participant stated that research has shown that if you go up to 21-24 students there won’t be a significant impact on the kids

**Additional Comments/Values for Administration*** The main value discussed around this item was putting a cap on class size – they wanted to communicate that they feel that there should be a cap of no more than 29 students per class
* Also wanted to stress that this should start with attrition as opposed to cuts
* Another participant stated that in the past, Administration wouldn’t agree to put a cap on the classroom sizes, so his concern was that class size could go beyond the 29 this group was recommending
* If there’s no cap on class size, this group does NOT agree to this option
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| **12. Computer Lab Assistants, Elementary Schools (2nd Option) -** Over 75% of the group agreed on this item | 3 |
| **Discussion:****Supporting Arguments*** Overall, the group seemed to be fine with teachers having more responsibilities in the labs
* They like that students are being exposed to technology
* One participant stated that he has been a tech teacher and he stated that if you have a teacher covering the class, he/she could get the job done
* A student said that there’s not a lot of learning happening in the labs – students are working independently
* It was brought up that the point of the math lab is for students to work independently (don’t need direct teaching)
* Having one person work across multiple schools is ok with this group

**Opposing Arguments*** An argument against this option was that there have been so many eliminations already and teachers are doing so much – they don’t have the prep time and can’t do what they need to do to be effective.

**Additional Comments/Values for Administration*** A suggestion was to consider making the lab mobile – send the computers to the kids
* A concern is that assistants don’t do the same thing across schools. This group wanted to find out what instruction is taking place in each school (for consistency) and wanted more information about what the district expects
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| **16. Social Workers (1st Option) -** Over 75% of the group agreed on this item | 6 |
| **Discussion:****Supporting Arguments*** After the discussion about the guidance counselors, the group agreed that they’d rather see the social workers cut than the guidance counselors because social workers don’t have the direct contact with the students
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| **22. Office of Superintendent -** Over 75% of the group agreed on this item | 1 |
|  |
| **23. Office of the Principal -** Over 75% of the group agreed on this item | 1 |
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| **19. Instruction and Curriculum -** Over 75% of the group agreed on this item | 2 |
|  |
| **30. Recreation (2nd Option) -** Over 75% of the group agreed on this item | 1.7 |
| **Discussion:****Supporting Arguments*** Think recreation is outside the school’s core responsibility
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| **Additional Comments/Values for Administration*** Suggestion that people pay a fee to keep recreation but then teachers will need to teach recreation (adding something more to what they already have to do)
* Think that this should be a township responsibility
* Think there should be a fee process administered by the township – take it out of the school district

**37. Fees (1st Option) -** Over 75% of the group agreed on this item | .4 |
|  |
| **4. Middle School Classroom Teachers (1st Option) -** Over 75% of the group did NOT agree on this item |  |
| **Discussion:****Opposing Arguments*** The concern about class size was brought up
* The group thought that classes over 30 are too big
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| **7. High School Classroom Teachers -** Over 75% of the group did NOT agree on this item |  |
| **Discussion:****Opposing Arguments*** It was brought up that class size varies per class
* The concern is that the average size is not known – without knowing, there wasn’t agreement

**Additional Comments/Values for Administration*** Suggestion of holding auditorium classes and breaking them out into smaller groups (like in college classes)
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| **24. Nursing (public and non public) -** Over 75% of the group did NOT agree on this item |  |
| **Discussion:****Supporting Arguments*** Pointed out that they would be reducing not eliminating
* Discussion about what the nurses do (i.e. Screenings, height, weight, BMI)
* Stated that teachers can call 911 in case of an emergency as easily as a nurse might

**Opposing Arguments*** Brought up that there are kids that need emergency medications and they wouldn’t want administrative staff who don’t have the appropriate training to administer emergency medications (want people who are legally certified to do this type of work)
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| **33. High School Sports (2nd Option) -** Over 75% of the group did NOT agree on this item |  |
| **Discussion:*** How do you separate booster and volunteer from bussing – stated that the boosters pay for the bussing)

**Opposing Arguments*** Think it should stay in the schools – you’ll get better participation from the students
* Team spirit – gets kids together and would be concerned if school was just school

**Additional Comments/Values for Administration*** Could it be 50-50? Parents pay half and the district pays the rest?
* Concern that if students are participating in club sports as opposed to school sports, they won’t be eligible for scholarships (one parent in the group said that they’d still be eligible for scholarships)
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| **37. (Fund Balance) -** Over 75% of the group did NOT agree on this item |  |
| **Discussion:****Supporting Arguments*** Would rather they take the money than impact programs

**Opposing Arguments*** The fund is already at a level that’s below acceptable
* If you go into this account, it won’t solve anything. The same problem will exist next year and they’ll have to look at everything again next year
* Short term fix that will bite us in the behind next year
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**SHARED PAIN:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Item/Service Area** | **Points** |
| **35. (2nd Option) -** Over 50% of the group agreed on this item | 37 |
| **Discussion:****Supporting Arguments*** Need to look at what it’s going to take to close the budget gap

**Additional Comments/Values for Administration*** Home taxes have gone up but business taxes have gone down (question and concern about that)
* Want to see them working on spending issues before they look at increasing property taxes
* Property taxes – need to have a better payment plan
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| **14. Guidance (1st Option) -** Over 50% of the group did NOT agree on this item |  |
| **Discussion:****Opposing Arguments*** Think it’s more necessary for the High School to have guidance
* Guidance counselors in the middle school have to deal with a lot of social and emotional challenges
* They’re “mental detectors” – we should have more. The kids need all the help they can get in that area
* Focusing on education, the guidance counselor plays the most integral role – should focus on outside services
* Social workers and psychologists don’t know all the kids in the school, the guidance counselors do

**Additional Comments/Values for Administration*** Find other sources of funding – Behavioral Health, partnerships, the group wants to keep and support the guidance counselors
* One participant brought up healthcare reform and said that this may be moot as the new healthcare reform would require/support this
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**GRAND TOTAL – 61.1 POINTS**