**Upper Darby School Budget Forum**

**Moderator Report**

**Group #5**

**Drexel Hill Middle School - 3.10.13**

**Moderator Shakira Abdul-Ali and Josh Warner**

**Scribe Liza Wallis**

**PART I: Group Makeup & Introductory Concerns**

Group Five had 32 individuals – 21 female and 11 male. Two participants were African-American and the rest were Caucasian. Most group members ranged from 30 to 50 years old, with about ten participants over 50. One current high school student participated, and three people self-identified as teachers that lived and worked in the Upper Darby School District. About 2/3 of the group hailed from Drexel Hill.

All of the participants were passionate about the issues at hand; however there were no overly strong positions within the group (such as pro-arts or anti-tax). The group was fairly high energy, and deliberated the issues thoroughly. Introductory concerns of the group included education quality (mentioned 8 times), taxes (mentioned 6 times), special programs (mentioned 5 times), as well as teachers, long term health of the district, class size, bussing, curriculum, and real estate values. At the end of the breakout session, Group 5 had achieved 37 total points – 30 in the Low Hanging Fruit bucket, and 7 in Shared Pain.

**PART II: Low Hanging Fruit**

Group 5 deliberated eight proposals on the worksheet for consideration as Low Hanging Fruit. Only six proposals made it over the 75% vote cut-off for inclusion.

Successful Votes:

**#22 Office of the Superintendent & #23 Office of the Principal**

* confusion on overtime pay:
  + is there a cap for overtime for those positions that are eligible for it?
  + no overtime for anyone should be allowed
  + positions are likely salaried, and therefore will not be able to receive overtime pay
  + is overtime solely for required work?

VOTE: 28 out of 32 (for 2 points total)

**#28(a) Transportation – Reduce 5%**

* increasing efficiency of bussing is key
* charge kids in high school for field trips, and adopt this same policy for all school kids
* bus drivers paid fully, and routes driven, even if only 1 seat of 35 seats on the bus is full

*Discussion around consideration of the 10% cut*

* 10% cut would impact the district long-term
* Safety/security concerns
* Not everyone can walk to school or have parents that can drive kids
* Bussing should be equitable – for instance, boosting service where kids are walking far, say from 69th st terminal vs. reducing it in areas where kids easily walk to school
* Big difference between the 5% and 10% when considering safety
* Could bussing be cut only for the parochial schools? District should look into this

VOTE: 25 out of 32 (for 3 points total)

**#35(a) Property Taxes – Increase up to the 2.4% index (0.79 mils)**

* QUOTE: “It’s the lesser of all the evils on the sheet”
* Tax increase is inevitable; if it has to increase anyway, might as well choose the least painful
* Least impactful on those that have trouble paying increases
* QUOTE: The average increase is “equal to 5 or 6 pizzas in a year” – need to put the increase in perspective
* It’s okay to take a hit on taxes to keep desired programs

VOTE: 29 out of 32 (for 22 points total)

**#34(a) Band/Choral/Theater, plus extra pay/extra duty – Reduce by 10%**

* Can live with the 10% reduction
* Want to keep the program overall, but this is one of the best cuts given the options
* Teachers end up putting in a lot of time for these programs – much of it outside of regular school hours

VOTE: 26 out of 32 (for 1 point total)

**#17 Coordinator and Secretary of Instructional Media**

* We can cut both positions
* We’re not sure what the current position’s responsibilities include
* We should eliminate EITHER 29 or 17
* If we make this cut, we’re not really eliminating the responsibility; we’re just redistributing the tasks

VOTE: 27 out of 32

Unsuccessful Votes:

**#11(a) Building Support: Elementary Schools – Reduce from 24 to 20**

* Pro: less of a direct impact on children
* Cons: elementary schools with 600 students, multiple entrances – schools with such sheer size need this kind of additional support (other than parental/teacher support)
* Safety and Security are key
* Need all the support we can get

VOTE: 2 out of 32 (failed)

**#30(a) Recreation – Reduce admin & support staff by 20%**

* Pro: much of this should be included in students’ up-front recreation fees
* Cons: doesn’t affect just children – these are community services
* What about township basketball leagues and other township facilities?
* There are not enough recreational options as-is
* Concern that summer recreation programs sometimes amount to “free day care”
* District needs to clarify this choice:
  + Does it include summer stage?
  + Do not cut summer stage
  + Summer Stage is sponsored, so it is covered out of SD’s budget
* District must clarify: what exactly does this reduction entail? Admin costs only?
* Question: are we paying pension costs to the Director of Recreation (group concluded that this position is joint-funded by the school district and the township)

VOTE: 10 out of 32 (failed)

**PART III: No Way, No How**

Group 5 deliberated eight proposals on the worksheet for consideration as Low Hanging Fruit. At this point, two people from the group left, leaving 30 participants. All issues that were brought up made it over the 75% vote cut-off for inclusion.

**#1(b) and #1(c) Elementary Classroom Teachers – cuts & kindergarten**

* Cannot afford for young kids to not get the skills they need up-front for future years of schooling

VOTE: 29 out of 30

**#10 Noontime Support**

* Kids need to eat lunch at school
* School needs to take care of children during lunch hour
* Safety/security concerns if kids are walking to/from school mid-day
* Some parents aren’t home
* Bussing issues?

VOTE: 29 out of 30

**#24 Nursing**

* QUOTE: “People don’t get sick part-time”
* Must have nurses
* Safety issue

VOTE: 27 out of 30

**#8 – Lead Teachers –High School**

* We can’t cut H.S. Lead Teachers because of the sheer size of the student body – 4,000 kids; all hands are needed to deal with the issues that come up, e.g., violence issues. Safety first – critical.
* Lead Teachers get coaching and support from Principals for purposes of growing into role of Principal
* What about the Literacy Coaches in the elementary schools? They aren’t on the list, but we should cut them (may be paid by grant money)

**#18 – Library**

* Libraries can’t be cut
* Only have 2 librarians left; we’ve already made significant cuts to this in the past
* We have 2 directors of maintenance. $200K is for paid administration salaries
* Need to put administrators on the list for cutting!
* Cut the top; leave the bottom alone!

**#14 – Guidance; #16 – Social Workers**

* Workload is already too big
* Guidance counselors send transcripts to colleges; solve team issues; they do a LOT
* High schoolers don’t necessarily feel guidance counselors are helpful
* Not all students really get to see guidance counselors for advice
* Guidance counselors (GCs) only deal with students who are going to college
* GCs deal with students going through transitions;
* They cover a lot of support that isn’t at all of the schools
* GCs support mental and social matters; also address bullying
* What about Social Workers? They’re important also
* Can’t afford to cut this category
* Social Workers and GCs together provide necessary services
* They should be off the table

VOTE: For #14 a/b: 21; For #16 a/b: 24

**#35 D – 8.4% Tax Increase**

* TOO MUCH!!
* Get money from the Commonwealth
* Not everyone can afford this increase

Want to see this as the LAST resort measure, AFTER implementing ALL OTHER cost cutting measures (“Before you raise taxes 8%, you’d better show me every single cost-cutting measure you’ve implemented first”)

VOTE: 26 out of 30

**#37 – All Options – Fund Balance**

* If we use this, we’ll only need to put it back
* Just means another tax increase later on
* If we borrow funds, there are long-term implications
* We’ll get a further negative credit rating if our Funds get below 5% - 8%
* We need to get the money our district deserves
* Next year’s budget gap likely to be bigger

VOTE: 24 out of 32

**PART IV: Shared Pain**

We considered seven proposals for inclusion as Shared Pain, as outlined below. Of these six, Group 5 members determined that three items should be selected to be cutting.

**#2 and #5 – Lead Teachers (Elementary and Middle School)**

* Concerns for NOT cutting: Shifting Lead Teachers puts a burden on others; Lead Teachers are a support for administration as well as other teachers
* Principals are already doing much of the work that Lead Teachers do
* Is it possible to reduce #2 by half?
* Primus and Hillcrest don’t have Lead Teachers so this role isn’t applicable to all schools
* Lead Teachers aren’t teaching in the classrooms
* This cut becomes necessary because we can’t cut salaries, and can only cut positions;
* We NEED to do this though we don’t like it.
* Re #5 – See all of the above;
* The Middle Schools have Vice Principals so there’s less of a need

VOTE: 19 out of 30

**#15 – Attendance**

* Illegal students come in from out of the community by trolley
* We stay-at-home Moms made an offer to the school board to volunteer to follow the students coming in from outside the district; they wouldn’t allow us to do that
* They need to automate the Attendance process
* People who are currently doing this don’t do this job very well; the positions should be eliminated
* They should eliminate 1 officer and 2 secretaries
* Concern: There are only 3 officers for the whole district; they are swamped

VOTE: 26 out of 30

**#8 – Lead Teachers –High School**

* Take this off the table

**#18 – Library**

* Take this off the table

**#14 – Guidance; #16 – Social Workers**

* Take this off the table

**GRAND TOTAL – 37 POINTS**