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Upper Darby Enlists Residents' Help In Tackling School Deficit

February 27, 2013 12:19 PM

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(Credit: John Ostapkovich)

By John Ostapkovich

UPPER DARBY, Pa. (CBS) — The Upper Darby [School District](#), facing a nearly \$10-million shortfall in the next budget year, is doing something unusual: essentially deputizing its citizens to help find a solution.

About 60 people gathered in a senior center this morning, first to listen and then to communicate (no yelling allowed).



Reporting

John Ostapkovich

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Harris Sokoloff, John Ostapkovich, KYW Newsradio 1060, Upper Darby Pa., Upper Darby School District

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Harris Sokoloff, of the

[Center for School Study Councils](#) at the [University](#) of Pennsylvania, says this process is unusual because the public often gets to see the budget only after the tough choices have already been made.

"(Traditional budgeting) treats the [school](#) board and the administration like a vending machine that didn't give the candy they wanted," Sokoloff tells *KYW Newsradio*. "They (the public) kick, they scream, they yell. Normal reaction, okay. We're trying to change that by having the public have a conversation amongst themselves about the kind of things they will and will not support."

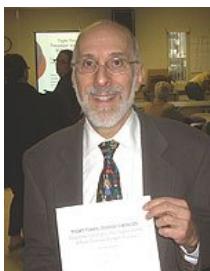
Using a four-page worksheet, breakout groups and professional mediators mulled over a list of options tagged with the percentage of the problem each solved, trying to come up with various combinations that totaled 100 percent.

For example, an annual tax hike averaging \$329 per homeowner would cover 73 percent of the school budget shortfall. A 20-percent reduction in administrative staff, on the other hand, would provide less than one percent of the money needed.

No doubt different groups will solve the puzzle differently, and there are three more meetings to go. A summary of the findings will go to the Upper Darby school board.

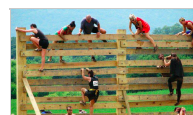
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(Harris Sokoloff holds a copy of the "Tough Times, Tough Choices" questionnaire. Credit: John Ostapkovich)

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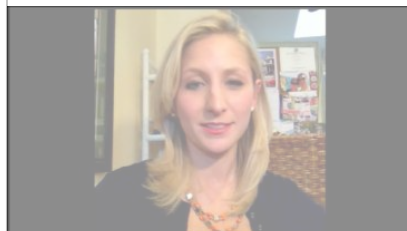
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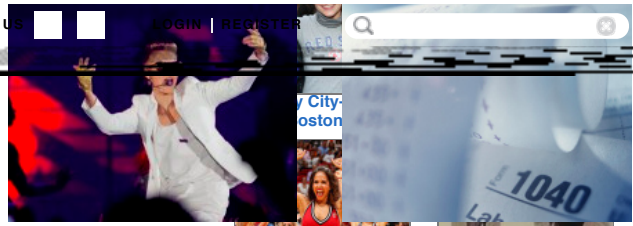




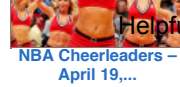
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