

Opinion

## LETTER: Upper Darby School District seeks input at budget forums

Wednesday, February 27, 2013

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To the Times:

What if you could be directly involved with major budget-related decisions for education in your township? Now, if you live in the Upper Darby School District, you can.

At the request of the Board of School Directors of the Upper Darby School District, four community school budget forums are being designed and run by the University of Pennsylvania Project for Civic Engagement, which has teamed up with the Center for School Study Councils.

Called "Tight Times, Tough Choices: Community Input into the District Budget," the forums create a way for residents from the Upper Darby School District to share their perspectives on a variety of ways of closing a \$9.7 million gap facing the district. This will help inform school district officials on participants' budgetary priorities for the 2013-2014 school year.

Each community forum will begin with a brief presentation about Upper Darby School District's current fiscal situation. Attendees will break into small groups for the heart of the forum, when they'll review the budget options. At that point, these small groups will work through possible choices and trade-offs that face the school board and its administration.

Many of the choices facing the Upper Darby School District and its future aren't easy, but choices must be made. All will involve trade-offs among things parents and community members want for their children and their community.

This work is richer and more productive if residents from all communities, all ethnic groups and all income levels participate in the workshops.

We need a diversity of views, of goals and concerns, even those with which we might disagree. As Raya Fagg, a member of the advisory group which is helping on the project, notes, "We have every right to have all of our voices heard — and not just on election day."

Our trained facilitators will help residents work together to determine their priorities for the school district's budget, and to clarify the reasons for those priorities. The Upper Darby School Board and school administrators have promised to consider input from these forums and report back to the community later this spring about how that input is reflected in the budget the school board adopts.

Here's the schedule of the "Tight Times, Tough Choices" community forums:

n Today, from 10 a.m.–noon: Watkins Senior Center, 326 Watkins Ave., in Upper Darby.

n Tuesday, March 5, from 7 p.m.–9 p.m.: Beverly Hills Middle School, 1400 Garrett Road.

n Sunday, March 10, from 3 p.m.–5 p.m.: Drexel Hill Middle School, 3001 State Road, Drexel Hill.

n Monday, March 11, from 7–9 p.m.: Westbrook Park Elementary School, 199 Westbrook Drive, Clifton Heights.

Advance registration is requested. To register, visit <http://tinyurl.com/UD-SchoolBudgetForums>.

If you are unable to register ahead of time, you can register 30 minutes before the start of each forum.

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