**Upper Darby School Budget Forum**

**Moderator Report**

**Group #3**

Watkins Senior Center – 2.27.12

Moderator: Loretta Raider, Shakira Abdul-Ali

**Participants**

Our group was comprised of approximately 16 participants as follows (1 – 2 people came late; left early):

* Seven males – 3 seniors - (looked to be aged 70+), White; 1 Black African descent, looked to be young 20’s; 2 Asian descent ; 1- White, working age, involved parent
* Nine females – 3 Black African descent (one: foreign born – W. African? Another: H.S. school student, active participant; Other: Retired, living on fixed income, spoke as if childless resident); 1 Asian descent, child with special needs; 5 White – involved parents

Most people participated at some level, by asking a question or nodding; everyone seemed to listen actively. Their mood was business-like (serious, though not stern), and ready to do the work. Three women offered a good deal of fact-related information in sharing their responses. One of the senior gentlemen offered a recommendation as he shared a story about what was available in the schools when he was enrolled (his principal served simultaneously as a classroom teacher and sports coach). He was reminded by another participant that that “kids today are NOTHING like we were when we were in school.” He was disappointed, but apparently not discouraged. An African American female H.S. student was vocal about several proposed cuts (social worker and sports), offering sound and convincing reasons for keeping those services. There was also a concern expressed about “Illegals” enrolled in the school system, who are using precious resources (if we got rid of the illegals, there might be a reduction in those costs).

Discussion related revenues suggested that reasons for not wanting taxes raised had to do either with being on a fixed income, OR, more broadly, not being confident that current collections were being spent wisely (is the Contractor RFP process transparent? Cost-Benefit driven? Efficient and fair?). Also, there were concerns about the best use of available land resources (Q: “Why doesn’t the Town do something about all those buildings sitting vacant? That is taxable property going wasted!” A: “If we don’t have a good school system, NO ONE is going to want to come here to build anything!”)

**Expense / Revenue Categories**

**Low Hanging Fruit**

No. 37 – Fund Balance – 15pts

‘Even though we know we need to keep a certain amount in the Fund, we might as well as start where there’s no direct pain. We will decide on the points value at the end of this process, when we know how many points we can get from other areas.’

Some participants wanted to take $1 million; some wanted to take $2 million. They agreed to “split the difference,” by recommending $1.5 million.

No. 1. – Elementary Classroom Teachers

No. 7 – High School Classroom Teachers

We can gain 18pts by increasing average classroom size by 3 students. “I don’t want to sit here and call for laying off anybody from a [teaching] job; jobs are hard to come by these days. **But if we can get rid of the illegals (sic),** we might be able to reduce the size of the teaching staff by attrition.”

No. 30 – Recreation – 1.7pts

While important, our schools are not in the recreation business. This is an area that can be sacrificed.

No. 36 – Fees - 0.8pts

No. 19 – Instruction and Curriculum –2pts

No. 22 – Office of Superintendent – 1pt

No. 25 – Business / fiscal services – 1pt

The group arrived at these four items fairly quickly as places to start for reducing costs; there was little discussion about any of them; some joking about ‘who’ was sitting in a few of the positions (this was a little hard to follow).

**Shared Pain**

No. 2 – Elementary Lead Teachers – 5pts

No. 5. – M.S. Lead Teachers – 2 pts

No. 8 – H.S. Lead Teachers – 2 pts

The agreement about Lead Teachers was not across the board. While some questioned the need for the position (this seems to be a redundant position); others saw and felt that Lead Teachers were available for important communications with parents, which sometimes prevented important issues from “falling through the cracks.” The consensus was that reduction could be acceptable, as long as Lead Teachers were “left in the schools that need them the most.”

No. 4(a) – M.S. Classroom Teachers – 4 pts

Reducing Middle School classroom teachers through attrition may have to happen, even though class size might increase from average of 27 to 30; this isn’t a good option because M.S. is a difficult age group; kids need more guidance at this age. If we do this, we should also do it for the H.S. We DO NOT want to move to a Jr. High School model.

No. 16 – Social Workers – 6 pts.

While Social Workers in the schools are critically important for some of the kids, these services CAN be available from other sources / organizations. Outside agencies can help with this work.

No. 35 – Property Taxes – 22 pts.

Nobody wants to see property taxes go up, however all agreed they’d be foolish to think they won’t. “I can’t pay more than 2.4%; I’m retired, don’t have kids in the system; never did.” “I can pay more.” “If we have deteriorating schools no businesses will move into town.”

No. 23 – Office of the Principal – 1 pt.

Implement this reduction if we get DO NOT get rid of Lead Teachers

No. 28 – Late bussing – 3pts

Discussion: People realize how important bussing is, however … “Private school students shouldn’t get bussing services.” “Bussing is done inefficiently!” “Why don’t they offer advertising on buses to raise revenues?”

**No Way, No How**

No. 4(b) - We DO NOT want to go to a Jr. High School schedule. It is important to keep the Middle School Team Teachers model.

No. 32 – M.S. Sports

No. 33 – H.S. Sports

No. 34. – Band, Choral, Theater, etc.

Sports and related after-school programs are critical for student development; they serve as an incentive for academic performance (kids can’t participate unless grades are up to par); they serve as means of socializing and reducing opportunities for getting into trouble. “There is NO BASKETBALL COURT in the entire community where my son can go and play ball!”

No. 28. – School Transportation

For some kids, if they don’t get transportation, they won’t go to school

**Gut Wrenchers**

Surprisingly, nothing was offered for this category

**GRAND TOTAL FOR POINTS – 83.5**

**Other Issues / Options**

* We need more information on what the Fund Balance is
* What about Teacher Pension Funds?
* Look carefully at the RFP process – especially in areas of Healthcare and Telecommunications – make sure it is competitive for all vendors