**Upper Darby School Budget Forum**

**Moderator Report**

**Group #4**

**Watkins Senior Center – 2.27.12**

**Moderator: Gwynne Scheffer**

The composition of Group 4 including one African female, two African American females, two White males, two African American males and two White females and diversity in age from 20s to 80s. Participation amongst group members was for the most part very active. We started the session by taking time to sit and read through the citizens worksheet. Group members initially felt that all choosing would be difficult. One group member commented that these impacts really aren’t good – impact level isn’t ideal. Also a group member suggested that there may be other alternatives. The moderator suggested adding a wishlist to the individual sheet and turning it in at the end of the forum. Additionally there were concerns about putting people out of work. However, the group was able to discuss the issues, personal views and share knowledge about the district with the each other and work collaboratively to make choices. No dissenting worksheets were given to the moderator. However, an 88 year old member of the group wanted her taxes reduced since she no longer had children in school. Her children attended parochial school when they were growing up, therefore she didn’t feel she had any impact on the discussion. At least two group members encouraged her to stay. She excused herself from the group but was directed to the Wailing Wall with her individual tax reduction concern.

**Low Hanging Fruit**

#6 Middle School Specials Teachers (6 votes)

* Reduce technology computer instruct staff from 8 to 4
  + Consolidation and elimination of teachers at the middle school level occurred last year which was a concern for one of the group members
  + Agreed that technology should be integrated but wanted to know more specifics about the technology curriculum, what students are learning and how technology instruction would be combined with computer instruction
  + Conceptually students get this instruction at home

#19 Instruction and Curriculum (6 votes)

* Reduce staff and shift responsibilities to other administrators and staff by 10%
  + The work will still get done with less people

# 14 Guidance (6 votes)

* Reduce guidance staff at UDHS from 12 to 8 (2 at each center)
  + Lack of confidence in the existing guidance counselors or their abilities to advise students
  + Not helpful to students (parent’s direct experience with her daughter)
  + Guidance counselor was a gym teacher the year before
    - What are the qualifications of the guidance counselor
    - What qualifications are taken into consideration when teachers are shifted

#25 Business/Fiscal Services (7 votes)

* Reduce secretarial support by 5%
  + Minimal impact to students
  + Increased cost related to overtime are possible but not probable

**GRAND TOTAL – 57 POINTS**

#26 Maintenance (6 votes)

* Reduce contracted repairs, layoff one person and delay necessary repairs
  + Made the decision for 2% rather than 4% based on the input for a group member who lives across the street from one of the schools
  + Concerns that the aesthetics of the building in the neighborhood will be impacted

#29 Information Services (6 votes)

* Merge information services with media services
  + “let’s get with the 21st century”

#22 Office of Superintendent (7 votes)

* Reduce secretarial support by 5%
  + They need to feel it too
  + They need to work more efficiently

#23 Office of the Principal (7 votes)

* Reduce secretarial support by 5%
  + This was discussed in the context of #22 in that they need to feel it too and need to work more efficiently

The service areas rejected during our discussion:

One group member whose is parent of son enrolled in school suggested that #1 (reduce elementary school regular education by anticipated loss of 10 teachers through attrition), #4 (reduce middle school teaching staff by 5 through attrition), and #7 (reduce high school teaching staff by 10 through attrition) be considered at low hanging fruit. Another group member added that increasing class size would be fine as long as the cuts were spread evenly across the district schools and not clumped together. This also spawned concern about the accuracy in class size stated on worksheet because at Hillcrest the class size is already 30. This member also refrained from making a decision due to the questionable numbers reported on the worksheet. This only received one vote from the one who proposed it.

#15 attendance surfaced briefly prompting the comment at illegal students are a big problem but there was not further discussion of this service area.

There was a brief discussion and debate with regards to #32 turning middle school sports into club only and #33 eliminating ninth grade sports. Issues such as parents not being able to pay for club sports, opportunities for students to showcase their talent, sports opportunities for immigrants e.g., soccer were surfaced. The need for students to be engaged in sports was discussed but it never made it vote.

#28 transportation also briefly touched near the end of our time but it was stated that busing is needed for safety issues.

Additional points:

After discussing the first few service areas, the suggestion was made by a group member to take advantage of the lower impact items first. Curriculum and instruction were off the table and the focus should be on making cuts that don’t directly impact children/students.

Another member surfaced the expired teacher contracts. Teachers are in their second year without a contract. There needs to be a shared sacrifice by the adults that doesn’t impact the kids. District should negotiate a contract that reduces salaries and enables teachers to keep their jobs. Don’t touch curriculum and instruction.

**No Way, No Hows**

#1 Eliminate Kindergarten/reduction of 27 teachers (7 votes)

* One member who is not a parent shared that pre-k and kindergarten are the foundations for success in school

#16 Social Workers (5 votes)

* Reduce social workers from elementary and secondary schools from 16 to 8
  + Social workers provide a benefit to students for academics and the outside environments while in school, e.g., child abuse, bullying
  + Teachers don’t have the knowledge and skills to provide the same type of support that students need to deal with all of other issues they face
  + Social worker position reductions took place last year so we shouldn’t reduce this year

The service areas rejected during our discussion:

One group member felt that the entire first page of the worksheet was a no way, no how as it would significantly impact instruction. It was acknowledged by at least two group members, that this was very difficult.

**Shared Pain**

#37 Fund Balance (6 votes)

* Use $2.0 million from fund balance
  + One of the group members shared that the School Board already proposed using $3.0 million from the fund balance at a recent meeting. The impression was that if the School Board has already proposed this then they’ll probably to with it. But this group believes it should not exceed $2.0 million since it’s a onetime deal and their taxes will eventually be raised in the future.
  + A discussion about the nature of the fund and the concern that depleting the fund would impact the credit rating of the school district, its bond and its ability to raise capital.

The service areas rejected during our discussion:

None

**Gut Wrenchers**

#35 Property Taxes (6 votes)

* Increase property tax up to the index of 2.4%
  + Have to chose 2.4% because it’s the lowest and better than the alternative (higher tax rate)
  + Fund balance will be impacted so it’s needed

The service areas rejected during our discussion:

The attrition issues discussed earlier (notes under Low Hanging Fruit) were put back on the table by the initial proposer of the idea. The group was unresponsive to the idea.