**Upper Darby School Budget Forum**

**Moderator Report**

**Group 1**

**Westbrook Elementary School – 3.11.13**

**Moderator- Germaine Ingram and Shakira Abdul-Ali**

**Participants**

Our group consisted of 32 participants, as follows:

* 21 females – including four women of color; one female H.S. student
* 11 males – including 2 men of color; two male H.S. students

People described themselves as:

* Parent (20)
* Teacher (3)
* School employee (4)
* Taxpayer (16)
* Student (3)
* Alum
* Grandparent
* New resident (less than one year)
* Realtor
* Small business owner

We divided our group into four smaller teams so as to breakdown the questions, and allow each person more time to speak and express their opinion. The groups worked well together, though some could not reach consensus on some several of the issues they discussed. Several participants had attended previous forums, and didn’t hesitate to share the positions and information that emerged from those groups. The most heartfelt discussion took place near the end of the session, about the question of taxes. They agreed on a 2.4% increase (the lowest option), though one gentleman stated that, “We KNOW it’s gonna be more than this!” Another parent very passionately spoke of his young adult children who love Upper Darby and want to remain in the neighborhood but they won’t be able to, as they’re being priced out by the taxes. Yet – they know that the schools’ performance have everything to do with why people want to come to this area.

**Expense / Revenue Categories**

**Low Hanging Fruit**

**17. Eliminate Coordinator & secretary of Instructional Media**

We don’t lose the service; the tasks shift to someone else.

**Passes as LHF.**

**22. Office of Superintendent – reduce secretarial support by 5%.**

**VOTE: Passes as LHF – 28 of 32**

AND

**23. Office of the Principal – reduce secretarial support by 5%.**

**VOTE: Fails as LHF – 14 of 32;**

Discussion on both items – 22 and 23:

We’re saving more than hourly wages here; we’re also saving benefits as well. Doesn’t directly affect the children. In high school, can’t imagine reducing secretarial support. Teacher in large elementary said she couldn’t imagine reducing secretarial staff. Every school is different. People didn’t understand how the cuts would be made.

**25. Business / fiscal services**

This seemed like an easy one, notwithstanding that it would generate overtime pay for required work.

**VOTE: Passed 28 of 32**

**28a. Transportation (public / non-public) – eliminate late busing – 5% reduction**

There are other options for late busing. Field trips are really expensive, and kids are paying for this anyway. Current bussing patterns / practices are inefficient.

**VOTE: Passes – 29 of 32.**

4b. Reduce middle school staff, moving to a Jr. H.S. model

One parent reported that the middle school, team-teaching approach does not show better results than the Jr. H.S. model, nationally. We do OK for kids up to the 5th Grade level; by the 8th Grade, they’re not doing well. For that reason, consideration should be given to this option. Many parents don’t really understand what this action means. There is a lot of concern about kids not being able to transition well from a middle school model to a jr. high school schedule. This option represents a loss of team planning and teaching that would hurt us. “You can’t teach content; hurts effort to reach students. Don’t do block scheduling.

**VOTE: Fails as LHF**

11a. Reduce elementary office staff

All things considered, this seemed like an easy choice; it reduces but doesn’t eliminate service.

Concern: when you eliminate low-paying positions, you don’t get much pay-back ($$) for the lost staff (these positions usually do a LOT of work); whereas, when you eliminate an administrative position or a teacher, you get a LOT of return ($$) for the lost staff. The general public doesn’t understand what a lot of these positions actually deliver.

**VOTE: 14 of 32; Fails as LHF**

**No Way, No How**

33a. Eliminate 9th grade sports

This would take away an incentivizing opportunity for kids who can’t make the JV sports teams, or who are playing sports that don’t have a JV team.

34 a, b, c. Reduce Band, Choral, Theater, et al, by up to 30%

The District is known for these activities; these activities do a lot for our kids; many of these activities are self-funded (fundraising) and in some cases, generate income.

4b. Reducing middle school teaching staff

No one wanted to reduce teaching staff – particularly at middle school level.

Loses as Shared Pain; concluded as NWNH

16. Social Workers

This expense should be covered by the Township.

Couldn’t agree to include as NWNH; might pass as Shared Pain. (not enough time for discussion)

37. Reduce Fund Balance

No time for discussion; no resolution.

**Shared Pain**

**2.; 5.; 8. – Eliminate Lead Teachers**

Who takes care of discipline if there is no Lead Teacher? his is a really choice for a large school. Participants said this was a rushed vote, and there really wasn’t sufficient information, especially regarding the different impacts at different grade levels.

**VOTE: Passes S/P – 16 of 32**

**18a. Eliminate all three librarians; replace with 5 assistants.**

Librarians aren’t very visible, but someone needs to take care of the libraries. Many teachers don’t know when librarians are available, and simply schedule their classes for a visit. Help is made available when needed. At the elementary level, they only have librarians available every 6 -7 days. Don’t need what the librarians are doing at the elementary level; parents are filling in. eBooks are replacing hard copies. Teachers are serving as librarians for their students. H.S. Student: “I go to the library a lot to get my papers done. I usually find someone to help me, and to let me check out books when I need them. I don’t think these people are librarians.”

**VOTE: Passes as S/P – 25 of 31**

**35a. Raise taxes by 2.4%**

We have no choice but to raise taxes anyway. People are priced out of the community they love. Young people aren’t moving because the taxes are so high. Need to look at a different structure for taxes to support our schools. Not just property taxes.

“My total taxes have increased 2 ½ times in the last five years. I’m afraid I won’t be able to stay in my home even though its paid for, because I’ll have this huge tax bill every month.”

“A lot of people are just hoping that they’ll be able to get one of those reverse-mortgages, so that they can just stay in their own home, but a lot of folks aren’t able to it.”

“Some say we’re the Saudi Arabia of natural gas, here in Pennsylvania. But we don’t tax the gas industry!

“[The governor] received huge contributions from the gas industry. I didn’t vote for him because of that!”

**VOTE: Failed as LHF (7/32); Passed as Shared Pain (17/32)**

**GRAND TOTAL - 38 POINTS**