

TIGHT TIMES, TOUGH CHOICES: *Taxpayer Input into the Upper Darby School District Budget Process*

TAXPAYER FORUMS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27 10:00 A.M.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5 7:00 P.M.

SUNDAY, MARCH 10 3:00 P.M.

MONDAY, MARCH 11 7:00 P.M.



AGENDA

Welcome and Overview of the District Budget Situation

Harris Sokoloff, Penn Project for Civic Engagement

Small Group Work Sessions

Moderators and Recorders, Penn Project for Civic Engagement

Concluding Remarks: How your input will be used

Adjourn

WWW.GSE.UPENN.EDU/PPCE • PPCE@GSE.UPENN.EDU • WWW.UPPERDARBYSD.ORG

Thank you for taking part tonight. We salute your citizenship and concern for your school district.

Tonight, you will work with other residents to assess the difficult budget choices facing our school district. The results of your discussions will be sent to the Board of School Directors and administration. The Board and superintendent have agreed to use your work tonight as important input into their 2013-14 district budget. We have asked the Board to report back to you on how they factored your input into their budget decisions.

Tonight is an unprecedented effort to gather resident input BEFORE budget decisions get made. Please help it go well, first by giving it a chance, second by being civil and respectful of others.

The accompanying grid offers a sampling of possible budget steps being actively considered by the school district. Some steps would cut costs and services. Others would raise revenues, through increased taxes or fees, thus preserving some services.

This list is a representative sample of the many, many steps being considered to close a \$9.7 million budget gap, but it is far from complete. A full list would fill many pages. It would be impossible to absorb and discuss in one evening.

Each of these possible steps would be painful to someone. It would be great to avoid every one. But that's, unfortunately, not the world we're living in right now. State law forces the school district to balance its budget, requiring the kind of belt-tightening you're probably making in your own home, or experiencing at your workplace.

What will happen tonight? First, you'll hear a presentation about what the district is facing and how it came to be, and how the budget choices you'll review tonight developed.

Then you'll have two different chances for input:

1. You'll be assigned to a breakout group of 20-30 citizens to talk through the budget worksheets, working with trained moderators. Your group will make joint judgments on what input to give school district officials, for example: *Sure, cut this. OK, raise this fee. Do this only as a last resort. No way, no how should you cut this.*

Your group will come up with a joint set of recommendations, which will be relayed to the Board of School Directors. If you wish, you can also submit a personal version of the worksheet.

2. We've also set up a "wailing wall," where you can post any idea, comment, protest or suggestion you might have. The Board will get a copy of your note.

The grid/worksheet that you'll receive tonight presents several dozen steps the Upper Darby School District could take to balance its 2013-14 budget. The District is looking at a shortfall of more than \$9.7 million in its \$169.1 million spending plan.

Each step has a point value assigned to it. That value represents how much the step would do to close the budget gap, either by saving spending or raising revenue. To make this workshop as simple as possible, we've assigned you the goal of approving steps worth 100 points. So, a step worth 5 points would get you 5 percent of the way to closing the budget gap.

The grid has five columns:

1. The service area affected by the step, for example: regular instruction, support services, etc.
2. A description of the step, for example: *Reduce transportation by 5%.*
3. A few of the possible actions offer multiple levels of cuts, from less to more severe.
4. A description of the likely impact of the step. For example: *Eliminate busing of secondary schools. Eliminate transportation for all field trips. Increase efficiency of existing bus runs.*
5. The point value for this step.
6. Your group's decision on this step. If you write a zero in this column, that means you reject the step. If you accept the step, put down the point value shown in Column 4.

Again, your group's goal is to approve a combination of steps—either cutting costs or raising taxes and fees—equal to 100 points. As your group works, the moderators will ask questions to get at the "whys" of your decisions: *Why keep this? Why cut this? Why are you willing to pay more for this, but not for that?* This input is also vital to school board members.

If your group gets to 100 points, you'll get a small reward for that hard work. You'll review a selected "wish list." These are programs and services the district would like to add back into the budget, along with associated costs. District officials would like to hear what programs and services you'd support putting back into your schools should the district get extra money from the state or other sources.

Your moderators will keep tabs on the choices you make together, and will submit to the district ONE sheet representing your collective judgment. If you really, really don't agree with the choices your group made, you can submit an individual worksheet. If you want to do so, ask your moderator for an additional worksheet at the end of the evening and submit it at the registration desk on your way out tonight.

Ground Rules



- Listen to each other—it's as important as talking
- Talk with each other, not to the moderator. The moderator will lead your deliberations, yet remain impartial.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
- Everyone understands the talk is deliberative, involving weighing choices, not argumentative.
- If you disagree, don't try and solve it. Rather, explore where you disagree and why.
- Examine trade-offs across choices.
- Everyone works toward making a decision about what's best for the Upper Darby School District, not just one's own child or school.
- Listen to each other—it's as important as talking

PROJECT TEAM:

Harris Sokoloff, Linda Breitstein, Mary DiSangro

Tamika Barrow, Jeff Branch, Ted Enoch, Ellen Greenberg,
Germaine Ingram, Ellen Petersen, Loretta Raider, Gwynne
Scheffer, Terrill Thompson, Susan Tyler