

Minutes from UDHS PTO Meeting dated February 26, 2009  
Annual Community Service Meeting – District Wide

Erin Taylor called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. During the meeting the attendees worked on beading bandannas to be given to a local children's hospital. Mary Gold reported good income from Sportswear sales; in April we will discuss the teacher's wish list. The post-prom committee held the raffle drawing; the winners were Elise Weisman (\$400), Lisa Seidman (\$200) and Shellie Straub (\$100).

Dr. Rittenhouse gave a brief update on ClassRooms for the Future, the Greenfield Youth Festival being held at DeVrys, a Department of Justice sponsored Internet Survey to be given to the students, and the Save a Life Tour presented to Juniors and Seniors by the Greenfield Foundation.

Dr. Pladus and Dr. Rittenhouse then gave a presentation on the school district entitled Update/Issues and Challenges. They began the program with a slide show, and then reported on Academics, Construction, Taxes, Technology, Testing and the Achievement Gap. They noted that the school district television programs really began just 5 years ago, as prior to that it was confined to board meetings. They acknowledged Jason Trantas for all the work he has done in this area. Following the presentation, they opened the floor up to questions and comments from the audience, which were as follows.

Q. What is the school district doing to close the achievement gap?

A. The answer included increasing investment in the North Hills afterschool program, having new teachers undergo 6½ hours of cultural sensitivity training, the elimination of level 4 classes, and lowered class sizes. Dr. Pladus noted that another thing they could do is promote greater diversity among the professional staff.

Q. Is the District looking into getting any funding from the economic stimulus act?

A. Dr. Pladus noted that an earlier, House version, of the bill would have provided about \$400,000 for school modernization, but this language was later stricken. As it currently stood, it looked like the district could qualify for some funding, which would have to be used within a one year period.

Q. When will some elementary schools and the middle school get major work done?

A. Dr. Pladus noted that work has been quietly being done. Major roof work, boiler repairs and buzzer entry doors were done. He noted that in 7 years there will be a major dropoff in debt refinancing, at which point they are looking at doing 25 to 35 million dollars in major work district wide. Otherwise, nothing can be done without a referendum. Dr. Pladus noted that he feels the buildings are in good shape, and he feels good district wide, except that he would like to see air conditioning throughout the district. The bad state of the tennis courts at Sandy Run was brought up by someone, and they are in a flood plain and may be relocated. Major rehabilitation is also being done on the Planetarium and on the library at Thomas Fitzwater.

Q. With respect to long term planning for the school district and facilities, does the school district look at a census in the elementary schools to see what its future needs might be?

A. Dr. Pladus noted that in the foreseeable future they believe things will be stable, with no underutilized areas or overcrowding problems anticipated. There was a later question about whether the district has done any calculations based on a planned high density development in the Dresher triangle (they have not).

Q. Please elaborate on the changes in scheduling that were mentioned in the presentation.

A. There are no details, it is still very early. Areas they would like to address include the lunch schedule at the high school, which includes a broken up class, and the fact there are no semester electives at the high school, and complaints by teachers in the other schools that there too many pullouts, for the gifted program,

music, etc. They are not planning any changes in the date school starts, and are not looking at block scheduling.

Q. Governor Rendell has stated he would like to reduce the number of school districts in Pennsylvania, and does the school district think this could affect Upper Dublin?

A. Dr. Pladus noted that in this part of the state school districts are fairly large. Smaller school districts such as Springfield, Lower Merion, Jenkintown and Morrisville are more likely to be affected. He thinks we are fine and won't be affected.

Q. With respect to upcoming testing in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, will it be 45 minutes long, and can a parent be present during the testing?

A. The purpose of the test is to see if it can be used to identify children who are 'gifted'. It's an oral test and will take 3 days, totaling 45 minutes. One of the elementary school principals who was present stated that parents would not be permitted to sit in during the test, because that would change the whole dynamics of the testing.

Q. The District talks about not tracking students, so why does it continue to track in 6<sup>th</sup> grade?

A. The school district does no tracking up through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, except for Math. This has to do with Algebra readiness, and when a student is ready for it, they should have the opportunity to do it.

Q. When do 9<sup>th</sup> graders meet with the Guidance Counselor?

A. They will meet sometime within the next several weeks.

Q. The teachers don't realize that not everyone has computers, internet, etc., and that some people must rely on the town library, with its limited hours, and lots of driving back and forth, etc.

A. Dr. Pladus acknowledged this Digital Divide, and said at one point the district tried to get computers to everyone, but then there was still the lack of internet access. The township WiFi, which is currently stalled, would have been great, though there still would be a fee.

Q. Will there be transportation provided for the Summer Programs that were mentioned in the Presentation?

A. Dr. Pladus doesn't know, and they hadn't thought about this.

One of the parents stated that African American students are talked about like they are Aliens, and asked if it is felt there is something systemically wrong with the student. She went on to comment that it could be the teacher, and that the teacher should learn each child's learning style. She also noted there could be more representation of African American teachers, and this could be a big part of the gap. Another parent noted that too many African American children are not being put in Honors and A.P. classes, etc., and that her message to parents is to advocate for their children. A third parent noted her agreement and said that a child is not getting a proper education when they are being told he is not ready. She feels that parents are being told 'no' by the school, and that they are being told the child is not ready, and is not being tested for the gifted program. As a result the child gets bored, and misbehaves. She feels that a lot of African American children who are bright are being left behind.

There was a final comment on how much better the school board meetings are now, and Dr. Pladus made some closing remarks, and the meeting was adjourned.

Minutes prepared and submitted by Marian Racette, Secretary