POTTSTOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
JUNE 5, 2008 – 7:30 PM

The Committee of the Whole meeting of the Board of School Directors of the Pottstown School District was held on Thursday, June 5, 2008, at 7:39 PM in the Auditorium of the High School. The following board members were present: Mr. Edwin Edwards, Mrs. Amy Francis, Mr. Richard Huss, Mrs. Michele Pargeon, Mr. Dennis Wausnock, Mrs. Julia Wilson, and Mr. Nat White. Absent: Mr. Robert Hartman and Mrs. Judith Zahora. Also present were: Superintendent of Schools, David Krem; Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Reed Lindley; Director of Education and Human Resources, Dr. Jeffrey Sparagana; Business Administrator, Mrs. Linda Adams; Solictor: Mr. Stephen Kalis; Mr. John Armato, Mrs. Pamela Bateson, Mr. Stephen Rodriguez, Mrs. Gail Cooper, Mrs. Mia DiPalio, Mr. Robert Giering, Mrs. Loretta Hoch, Mr. Matthew Moyer, Dr. Angela Tuck, Mrs. Beth Yoder, Mr. Robert Decker, a member of the press and interested citizens.

AWARDS

Mr. Stephen Rodriguez, principal of Pottstown High School, presented the following students who received writing awards:

Ninth Grade – Crissa Ireland
Tenth Grade – Jinell Coleman
Eleventh Grade – Andre Mai
Twelfth Grade – Lauren Childs

Mr. Rodriguez had each student come to the microphone and read their award-winning writings. Mr. Richard Huss, School Board President, presented each winner with a medal.

Mr. Robert Hartman arrived at 7:43 PM.

PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2008-2009 PRELIMINARY BUDGET

Mrs. Adams reported that the only change identified at this time from the preliminary budget formerly presented was the awarding of a $325,000 grant which would increase revenues and expenditures by that amount. Any further changes to the preliminary budget will be discussed at the next Board meeting.

Mr. Philip Thees asked for the approximate percentage increase in heating costs in the budget. Mrs. Adams responded that the heating budget was increased by $75,000, but that the current year expenditures were under budget by $42,000 due to the locking in of costs through the consortium. She also warned that the district expects an increase of thirty to forty percent in both electric and gas costs for the 2009-10 school year.

A question was asked about public availability of the budget. Mrs. Adams replied that the tentative budget is available on the website, and that anyone could come into the administrative office for a paper copy. A follow-up question asked if salaries were included in the budget, and the reply was affirmative.

MINUTES
Mrs. Adams presented the minutes to be approved at the Regular June 19, 2008 Board meeting. No changes or comments were presented.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Personnel Committee
No Report – there will be personnel item discussed in Executive Session.

Finance Committee
No Report.

Facilities Committee
The Committee met with Mr. Angstadt on May 29th and were provided with an overview of projects including the storage building at the Stadium; the high school basement; security upgrade system testing; concession stand, as well as the normal areas to be addressed through the summer. The district has submitted plans to the Borough for the nine modular classrooms.

Montgomery County Legislative Committee
HB 1275 seeks to eliminate property taxes as a source of school funding. Many representatives support it. Senate Bill 1277 which was passed allows charter school to compete with school districts for alternative education program grants. Since alternative education expenses are included in the calculation for billing rates for charter schools, this will permit double dipping by them into tight alternative education funding grants. The House passed Bill 1438:1439 will restrict municipalities and school district from seeking assessment appeals. Mrs. Zahora asked if school districts could send students to the charter school alternative education programs. Mr. Kalis will look into it.

PSBA Representative

Form for submitting items for the 2009 Legislative Platform are included in the packets and due to PSBA by Friday, July 18, 2008. PSBA representatives testified before the Senate Education Committee that graduation competencies statements are false. There will be a Board Member Symposium July 13-14 at the Wyndham in Gettysburg, and a Solicitors Symposium June 26-27 at Penn State.

Mrs. Zahora arrived 8:07.

Montgomery County Intermediate Unit Representative
The MCIU Board provided for operation when no quorum is present through a resolution. This is often a problem at the July and December meetings. The Special Education allocation from PDE for Early Intervention children is $8368 per child. The MCIU will need to generate an additional $50,000 through Access Funds to fund their program. The MCIU was awarded a $980,000, 3-year American History Grant to set up the Valley Forge Freedom Institute for student field trips and resources for teachers. Mrs. Zahora asked how these funds will be utilized. Mr. Hartman responded that districts would be reimbursed for field trips and substitutes for participating teachers. The State budget will probably not be passed until the end of July.

Community Relations Committee
John Armato provided an update on school uniform awareness. There is a link on the website for uniform information with articles and pictures. Guidelines have been sent home. Last night the Middle School hosted a fashion show attended by 150 people. It will be on PCTV on Monday at 6:00 PM on Channel 98 and also on the website. There will also be a sample flyer going home with report cards.

Neighborhood Elementary Schools Project
Michele Pargeon visited the Amity Primary Center on May 14th and the Octorara Early Learning Center on May 28th. She watched the footage of the Avon Grove visit in February of 2007. On May 22nd the provided Committee was provided a summary of the faculty meeting discussions that were held by the Executive Committee of the Federation of Pottstown School Districts. Mrs. Pargeon presented their list of benefits from the synopsis of the discussions including increased opportunities for grade-level collaboration; reduced class sizes; consistent curriculum requirements district-wide; combined resources for subject areas; increased opportunities for gifted/talented students; smoother transition to the Middle School for all fifth graders attending the same school; increased stability for the high number of transitional students within our district; and the maximization of service delivery effectiveness for special education services. Mrs. Pargeon believes that district professional staff would support the students individual needs. She summarized that the center-based approach to education is not about making the jobs easier for administration, principals, or the professional staff, but for the benefit of all the students. She concluded that since the Washington Street corridor is no longer a viable option, should the Board vote in favor of the centers-based approach to education, the district would utilize existing school properties.

Mrs. Zahora stated that the Board never discussed that a possible center-based approach would be on existing school property.

Co-Curricular Activities Committee

Mr. Hartman said that two members of the Committee met on May 19th and reviewd items from last meeting. Old programs that had been cut have been added back. He asked about policies to add/delete programs. The committee talked about facility issues and a master calendar.

Dress Code Policy/School Uniforms
Addressed by Mr. Armato.

Technology/Curriculum Committee
No report.

Liaison with Borough Council and Economic Oversight Committee
Mr. Wausnock stated that we are waiting for the Council to make a selection. It was noted that the School Board can not make an appointment – only the Borough has the authority. Mrs. Zahora stated that perhaps it was time for the district and borough to get together again. Mr. Huss agreed and said he would set it up.

LIST OF BILLS

Mrs. Adams reviewed the list of bills of the general fund, the data processing fund, the elementary activities fund, and the athletic fund from May 9, 2008 to May 29, 2008 to be approved at the Regular June 19, 2008 Board meeting.

PERSONNEL

Dr. Sparagana reviewed the personnel items to be placed on the Regular June 19, 2008 Board meeting agenda for approval.

PROFESSIONAL LEAVES AND FIELD TRIPS
Dr. Lindley stated that there are two of our teachers for the Valley Forge Freedom Center. reviewed the professional leaves to be placed on the June 19, 2008 board agenda for approval. He presented the Professional Leaves to the Board, adding Lisa Snyder with Mrs. Cohen to the

Leadership Summer Academy at a total cost of $2368, and listed some of the beneficial sessions he'll be attending at the Effective Education Partnerships Conference in Fairfax, VA. Student Field Trips include sixteen students who will be participating in the Nanotechnology Camp at Penn State University under the guidance of Greg Troutman.

BID AWARDS
Mrs. Adams presented the Cafeteria Supplies Bid Award Sheet to be approved at the Regular June 19, 2008 Board Meeting.

CMD SERVICES, INC. – BUS RATES
Mrs. Adams presented daily rates for buses for transportation for the 2008-09 school year to be approved at the Regular June 19, 2008 Board Meeting. Mrs. Zahora asked if there is any competition. Mrs. Adams replied that she is not aware of any competitive services in the area, as CMD has the licensing for Pottstown. They are offering rates with increases of less than 3%.

SCHOOL LUNCH AND BREAKFAST PRICES 2008-2009
Mrs. Adams presented the recommendations of Mr. Bud Heller for school lunch and breakfast prices for the 2008-09 year for approval at the Regular June 19, 2009 Board Meeting.

SPECIAL EDUCATION CONTRACTS
Mrs. Adams presented contracts for special education services with Campbill Special School for Extended School Year for two students and with Opportunities School for the 2008-09 year for six students for approval at the Regular June 19, 2008 Board Meeting.

PSBA POLICY BOOK UPDATES
Mrs. Adams discussed contracting with PSBA for the examination of our policy manual for deficiencies and stated that the policies are in disparate need of updating. She asks that the Board consider assigning a Policy Committee to participate in the process. The district is in the process of receiving a quote, but estimates a cost of $8000-9000, and an annual update cost of $4000 for this labor-intensive service. PSBA will provide notification when policies should be examined and samples when updating is required. Mrs. Zahora asked if we still retire policies. Mrs. Adams stated that would be part of the process. Mr. Krem indicated that the district may not need to purchase the annual update portion, but also pointed out that updating a single policy not only involved administrative time and effort, but also input from the solicitor. Mr. Hartman mentioned that the Board discussed this option several years ago and that perhaps PSBA could do it more efficiently with their experience and research to uncover potential problems.

ADOPTION OF 2008-2009 FINAL BUDGET RESOLUTION
Mrs. Adams stated that the district is required to pass a Final Budget Resolution before June 30th and that it will be requested at the Regular Board Meeting on June 19th.

2008 HOMESTEAD AND FARMSTEAD EXCLUSION RESOLUTION
Mrs. Adams presented that the District is required to accept or reject the gambling monies generated by Act 1. The 2008 Homestead and Farmstead Exclusion Resolution is the tool for accepting these funds. Each Homestead Exclusion will receive a credit of $398.00 on the School District Real Estate Tax Bill. Approval will be requested after the 2008-09 Final Budget is approved.

NON-CONSENT
None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

REPORTS

None.

INFORMATION

1. Treena Ferguson Thank You Letter
2. Guidelines for Submitting Items for the 2009 Legislative Plantform
3. Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign
4. PSBA Bulletin
5. Conferences for Administrators, Supervisors, and Teachers
6. School Board Technology Update (April)

FEDERATION REMARKS

Mr. Robert Decker stated that he is pleased with the Uniform pamphlet and glad that it will be included with the report cards. He also thanked the Board Member, administrators and staff throughout the District for attending the baccalaureate and graduation ceremonies.

ROUND TABLE

Mr. Huss asked for Mr. Hartman's position on the Elementary School Project. Mr. Hartman stated that he thought the centers-based approach was eliminated from consideration, but it sounds like it is back. He has issues with it and feels that the election results indicated we should stay with neighborhood schools. He read the reports from the committee meetings and believes that information was available before the election. Mr. Hartman stated that he was on the Superintendent's Redistricting Committee two years ago that reviewed everything and mentioned three neighborhood (not center-based) schools (Lincoln, Rupert, and Franklin.) He believes decreasing from five to three schools could incorporate educational benefits of center-based school as well as possible. He feels the district needs the neighborhood concept.

Mr. White stated that although he was not prepared to make a statement on cost, small schools don't have to be prohibitedly more expensive.

Mrs. Wilson stated the Writing Award reading were excellent. She joined Mr. Krem at the Health and Wellness meeting. She stated that numbers they received in April 2008 indicated that keeping all five schools was less expensive by $4 million than keeping three elementary schools and closing two of them. She advised interested people to look up the May 17, 2008 issue of Newsweek, 'Small School Rising.' She stated that she has not changed her position, and still wants the individual schools.

Mrs. Pargeon enjoyed ESL Program at Edgewood; Art andMusic Night; the Math Fair and Uniform Fashion Show.

Mrs. Zahora thought graduation was awesome and the speaker, one of our own, was great!

Mr. Edwards thanked the public for coming out, and supports an elementary configuration of three to five buildings.

MR. HUSS ANNOUNCED THAT FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC HEARING ON THE ELEMETNARY SCHOOLS, THE BOARD WOULD BE HAVING AN EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS PERSONNEL ISSUES AFTER THE MEETING.

Jeannie Howard, 1497 Sunset Drive, stated that she is in favor of five elementary schools and that she choose to live here in Pottstown for the neighborhood schools so that her children can walk to school.

Kelli Wolfel, 508 Clearview Street, is in her 17th year as a Pottstown teacher and has two children in Pottstown schools. She was excited about the central campus idea when it was presented and is very excited that it is back on the table. She stated that it will provide endless possibilities for the district and the borough. She recognizes that change is difficult, however, she supports the central campus approach as a mother and a teacher.

Philip Thees, 63 South Evans Street, former Board member, encouraged the Board to go over the facts. He referred to the May 27th Mercury article about Mrs. Pargeon's change of opinion in supporting the grade school consolidation. As a former Board member and Treasurer, he stated he understands the effort involved in understanding the financial elements of this decision. When the Board first discussed the possible consolidation, he did not support the idea, but accepted the collected decision to study the idea. He stated that the more he learned, the more consolidation made sense from an academic as well as financial point. Through the public discussion, he often heard low figures for renovation of all five grade school buildings versus consolidation, and wondered where the figures came from. He pointed out that Mrs. Pargeon, in the May 27th article, stated that her initial support of the five elementary school was based on out-dated information. He urged the Board to look at the new consolidation and centralizing the elementary education program.

Mrs. Mackewiez, 73 North Evans Street, decided not to speak.

Dan Weand, 1010 North Evans Street, thanked Mrs. Pargeon for continuing to study the issues, collect the facts, and change her position. He quoted Mr. Hylton from a Mercury article that Pottstown has the tenth highest real estate taxes in the state. He reminded the Board that two years ago we could have had a state-of-the-art early learning center for about $5 – 10 million. Last year the public was promised that we could refurbish all five of our elementary school, but were not told that the cost would be over $55 million dollars, and cause a 25-50% tax increase. Pottstown can not afford refurbishing all five elementary schools, and asked the Board to consider consolidation.

Dr. James Smock, 1009 North Evans Street, thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak and questioned whether or not the Washington Street Initiative Area was out of consideration. As a former Board member, he learned that the right decision addresses both education and financial needs of the community, and is not always a popular decision. He urged the Board to act as a team who needs to see educational benefits and economic advantages with every decision. He stated that maintaining the five elementary schools are beyond the tax base abilities of Pottstown. He commended Mrs. Pargeon.

Beth Yoder, President of Pottstown Teachers Federation, that three years ago when consideration about the elementary schools, the teachers were not asked for their opinions. Now the Board has formed a committee of the school board, administration, and teachers from the buildings in the district and asked their opinion. The options that the Federation put together were compiled from seven different buildings and 271 teachers and supports staff. Only ten people opposed the central-campus idea, and that they could not provide reasons for their opposition. She stated that the district has schools in neighborhoods, but that we do not have neighborhood schools. She assured the Board that students will not fall threw the cracks in a large building. She urged anyone wanting to discuss the educational aspect of this decision to contact any one of the teachers.

Kathy Marchek, Pottstown teacher, is a member of the Neighborhood Schools Project Committee which was given the assignment to meet with the teachers to discuss the best educational opportunities for our students. The teachers and staff overwhelmingly decided the centers-based idea was best.

Lois O'Dell, 225 Grace Street, a support staff person at Pottstown High School, and agreed with the mega-campus. She understands the appealing idea of neighborhood schools, but that the districts needs to look to the future for the sake of the children. She urged the Board to look out of the box.

Robert Decker, vice president of the Federation and teacher at the High School, stated that the only constant in successful schools is the teacher. He referred to research that stated that teachers have the greatest impact on teachers and mentioned the 'Failure is Not an Option' program from the Hope Foundation. He said that the sustained learning required for successful schools is only possible through collaboration among the teachers. He gave personal examples of the benefits available such collaboration available now at the high school. He urged the Board to support the teachers' recommendations.

Andrew Fisher, 1222 North Evans Street, questioned the statements that one campus will provide better education by stating that the five elementary school are now exceeding AYP standards, but that the two consolidated buildings, the middle and high schools, are not meeting AYP standards. He believes that the facts indicating better elementary education with the consolidation are wrong. He also said the cost to renovate the five buildings is not $55 million, but rather $36 million. He said the election indicated that 80% of the residents voted for five new board members and feels that Mrs. Pargeon went back on her word, and that the board members should represent the community, and would like to remove her from the Board.

Julia Kummerer, 1048 South Street, stated that the new Board members were voted into office for their support for renovating all five elementary schools. She quoted comments from the new Board members following the election from the Mercury. She feels that the public was betrayed with Mrs. Pargeon's change in position. She stated that there is no evidence that children performed better in a larger setting and referred to the recent Newsweek article, 'Small Schools Rising'.

Robert Morgan, former Board Member, 850 North Charlotte Street, commend the elementary school project on their study, and commended Mrs. Pargeon courage to change and speak her mind after studying the facts and making up her own mind. He disagreed that the new members

were elected on the mandate to save the neighborhood school, but thought the election was more about taxes and the proposed Washington Street location with the crimes that occur there. He reminded the Board that the economic base of Pottstown has not changed since his membership on the Board and stated that he doesn't believe the taxpayers can afford to maintain five elementary schools, and urged them to listen to the professional staff opinions.

Veronika White, 1335 Beech Street, voted for the five new members of the School Board for their support in renovating the five elementary schools and is insulted that the Board is considering any other options. She referred to the information provided at the May 20th meeting on the educational pros and cons of the six options. She pointed out that the two options for the consolidation campuses each listed at least twelve educational benefits, and questioned whether the benefits are quantifiable, and read an example. She pointed out that the option of keeping the five elementary school listed only one educational benefit – the buddy concept. She then discussed Lower Merion SD with six elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools, with all elementary schools kindergarten through fifth grade, and all older buildings which have been renovated through the years. She stated that the centers concept and the large consolidated campus does not have support in the academic literature and urged the Board to renovate the existing elementary schools and appoint a new Neighborhood Schools chairman.

Ralph M. Collick, 525 North Charlotte Street, was part of the election last year and accused Mrs. Pargeon of lying. He urged the replacement of Mrs. Pargeon, and offered rebatement services at a savings to the district for the elementary buildings.

Marie Oberholtzer, 13 Walnut Street, currently has four children in the Pottstown schools, and supports neighborhood schools. She urged grade level meetings across the district on early dismissal days. She stated that the new members of the Board were elected to support the neighborhood schools.

David Wallace, 76 North Adams Street, said he chose his home due to neighborhood schools and believes that consolidation is not a good idea.

Wendy Wilkinson, 435 North York Street, voted last year against the mega-campus and doesn't want her children walking through the proposed Washington Street location. She realizes that renovating all five schools may not be possible given the tax base available in Pottstown. She recommends building one or two schools on existing properties with energy-efficient features.

Robert Brown, 915 North Washington Street, has no children or grandchildren in the Pottstown School system, and agrees with Dr. Smock that the Board must do the educational analysis and the economic analysis and urged the Board to put these analysis in writing. He stated that the area proposed on Washington Street would not have been big enough and that the only existing site large enough for a single elementary campus would be Barth Elementary which has 12 acres. He told the Board to keep in mind that you would have 1600 students and 200 staff coming together twice a day, and that parents will continue to drop off and pick up their children. He projected the budget five years from now would be $66 million, 60% of the cost would be in instruction and unable to be changed. He hopes that a single campus approach would include laying off employees.

John Corson, 544 Jefferson Avenue, spoke on behalf of the NAACP as the vice president. Last year they urged the black community to vote for Mrs. Pargeon and other new members of the Board. He also expressed concern with the current quality of education if teachers feel that a mega-campus is required to provide a better education.

Dale Sassaman, 44 West Eighth Street, expressed that there is no middle ground. He has three children who have all placed at the top of their classes and all have urged that the Board keep the neighborhood schools. He also feels that the voters expressed their wishes with the election, and urged the Board to keep the five neighborhood schools.

Sharon Valentine-Thomas, 529 Butler Avenue, urged to Board to take their time to make the decision because it reflects the future of Pottstown. She stated that the voters have spoken and that their tone translates that they are saying they are willing to pay the price for the neighborhood schools. She added that if the Board responds that it believes it is not in the best interest to have that type of price tag associated with the renovation, then the Board has to market to the public the chose that they made in a way that makes sense and builds trust. She said that she was glad that the drive behind the decision is the education of the children.

Mr. Huss thanked the public for coming out and expressing their views and urged them to continue to attend Board meetings.

ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Mr. Wausnock and seconded by Mrs. Zahora that the meeting adjourn. All members present voted aye. The Committee of the Whole meeting was adjourned.

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Linda Adams
Board Secretary