

MUHLENBERG SCHOOL BOARD
Town Hall Meeting Minutes – April 27, 2011
Muhlenberg High School First Floor Lecture Hall

Call to Order

The Town Hall Meeting of the Board of Education of the Muhlenberg School District was called to order on Wednesday, April 27, 2011 at 6:40 p.m. by Board President, Mr. Otto W. Voit, III, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Members Present

President – Otto W. Voit, III
Vice President – Lee R. Reiniger
Treasurer – Richard E. Hoffmaster
Secretary – K. Scott Long
Assistant Secretary – Cindy L. Mengle
Member – John A. DelCollo
Member – Terry L. Heckman
Member – Barbara A. Nagle
Member – Donald B. Raifsnider, Jr.
Solicitor – James M. Lillis, Esq.
Recording Secretary – Brenda A. Stein

Administration Present

Superintendent – Dr. Theresa D. Haught
Assistant Superintendent – Dr. Vlacia Z. Campbell
Business Manager – Diane E. Lucchese, CPA
High School Principal – Michael Mish
High School Assistant Principal – Kevin Vanino
Middle School Principal – Donna Albright
Middle School Assistant Principal – Michael Kelly
Cole Intermediate School Principal – Dr. Ryan Giffing
Elementary Center Principal – Steven Baylor
Elementary Center Assistant Principal – Tim Moyer
Supervisor of Special Education – Michael Barr
Athletic Director – Kerry Ciatto
Technology Director – Daniel Houck
Food Service Coordinator – Tony Brochu
Buildings/Grounds/Transportation Coordinator – Greg Schneider

Visitors

Carol Heffelfinger	Janelle Madeira	Diana McKittrick
Mike Molusky	Linda Rozzi	Jessica Setley
Sharon Yeager	Cindy Yeager	Jackie Bellanca
Jill McIntyre	Kristina Antonellos	Jonathan Hobbs
Inga Hobbs	Michelle Hillegas	Donald B. Raifsnider, Sr.
Joan L. Raifsnider	William Baer	John Kahn, Sr.
Ronald R. Klee	Patti McCarty	Shannon Logan
Anthony Morganti	Carol Wertz	Georgian Jones
Karin Lessie	Gail Weyandt	Ron Bornmann
Kirstie & Lori Potteiger	Sharon Heckman	Marcia Stafford
Clarissa Enslin	Robert E. Yoe	Anastasia McGough
Ruth Deibert	Pete Martinez	Karen Rudderow
Kim Ganas	Sharon Damiani	Andrew LaFaver
Alicia Noll	Maryann Ligenza	John Winand, Jr.
Tina Nguyen	Robert Bean	Michael Simmons

Visitors (continued)

Lori Bauer-West
Marc Harr
Peggie DeLong
Lisa Ermler
Kathleen Buckley
Fred Feltenberger
James Niskoch
Laurie Vlasak
Darlene Allen
Paula Kline
Stacey Carmello
Michele Karohr
Patrice Prutzman
Rodney Miller
John Spangler
Adrian Zawara
Jean Kleckner
Robin Lysakowski
Julie McCarthy
Becky Polyniak
Amy Bourey
Laurie Smith
Kachina Martin
Joanna Banks
Jennifer Schaffer
Leslie Boyer
Kathy Depositer
Amy Sharp
Bob Horron
Steve & Brenda Emerich
Kathy Reed
Ernie Gring
Beth Weand
Pat Rissmiller
Dave Moore
Ted Seaman
Monica Good
Lucy Palangio
Susan Heffner
Mr. & Mrs. Paul Kuehne
Kenneth Romberger
Brian Potteiger
Dan Toomey
Melanie Brill
Debra Siggins
Connie Kretz
Rose Doermann
Angela Vallonio
Brian & Jenny Dorshimer
Judy Schaeffer
Katie DiStefano
Lori Werner
William W. Snelling

Beth Kleffel
Jacob Seiler
Neil Burke
Jeff Ermler
Kim Feltenberger
Barbara Klee
Tucker Irwin
Dan & Lori Wade
Jeff Gross
Faye A. Wummer
Jill Deyscher
Brenda Kripplebauer
Sharon Miller
Jamie & William Palmer
Cindy Seaman
Cyndi Evans
Mrs. Geoffrey Wert
Frank DiMartini
John Majewski
Justin Work
Nancy Faust
Tracie Nanna
Samantha Mengel
Joyce Davies
Andy LeClair
John A. Evans
Sid & Lisa Sweitzer
Richard Ott
Marcie Mauroschadt
Tracy Huey
Holly Foster
Lori Christ
Jolyn Casper
Marty Rissmiller
Donna Spangler
Alberto & Ruth Gonzales
Mike Reilly
Vicki Seidel
Melanie LaFaver
Tammy L. Calvaresi
Amy Thomas
Aubrie Potteiger
Ralph Kofroth
Tiffany Keller
Dave Mersinger
John & Margaret Shelly
J. M. Feltenberger
Dave & Sherri Mathias
Kathryn Knarr
Sara Patton
Nan Forrer
Nytza Santiago
Hao Duong

Linda Sassaman
Beth Youse
Sonya & Bell Manderbach
John Althouse
Anthony L. Iezzi
Susan Burkey
Thomas Irwin
Nelson Bowers
Claire Bratzman
Andrew Wummer
Toby Deyscher
Lisa Reinert Mengel
Janice Najaviar
Sandra Schneider
Yolande Hill
Sherry Houser
Gary Pumphrey
John W. Love
Kelly Petsch
Amy Youse
Dick & Suzie Cleveland
Marge & Hugh McGinley
W. J. Decker
Cindy Frymoyer
Tara LeClair
Dave Luckenbaugh
Lucia Campeatiu
Corinne Fecho
Jack & Joan McHale
Lindsay & Gary Deyscher
Denise Rapp
Jason Dunlop
Colleen Russo
Ray Bostard
E. M. Degler
Leslie Deatrich
Pat DeAngelo
Brian & LeeAnn Bieber
Walter R. Christ
Steve & Mary Wolfinger
Mary Plants
Diane O'Brien
Sherri Hinnershitz
Margaret Moyer
Stephanie Zimmerman
Riley Seiders
Patricia Keiper
Donna & Kirk Haubrich
Denton L. Buckley
John & Allison Bowman
Robert W. Smith
Scott Schaeffer
Liam Smith, *Eagle News Reporter*

President Otto Voit recognized public officials in attendance at the meeting:

- State Senator – Judith L. Schwank
- Laureldale Borough Council Member – John Kahn, Sr.
- Laureldale Borough Council Member – William Baer
- Laureldale Borough Council Member – Donald B. Raifsnider, Sr.
- Laureldale Mayor – Fred Feltenberger

President Otto Voit relayed to the audience that the proposed budget for 2011-12 school year is faced with several challenges in today's economy. The district started with a \$4 million deficit when the first draft of the budget was prepared in January 2011. Due to adjustments in state funding, local tax re-assessments, and the elimination of grants the Board is trying to balance a quality educational program and reasonable tax rates for the Muhlenberg community. Those affected are our friends, neighbors, and people we grew up with. The Board is asking for your help and direction for balancing the needs of education.

Dr. Theresa Haught, Superintendent, began the budget discussion stating that over the last few years the district has seen increasing challenges in preparing a balanced budget. Items affecting the annual budget include: Act 1 requirements, decreased revenues due to property reassessments, and the elimination of grants. The budget planning begins early in the school year with administrative meetings and then a preliminary budget is submitted to the Board for approval in January. If the budget is not balanced, the district may apply for exceptions under Act 1 which the district did this year. Other suggestions were made for cost savings options and those items were submitted to the Board for consideration. The Proposed Final Budget for 2011-12 will be voted on in May with the Final Budget approval to be made in June.

Mrs. Diane Lucchese, Business Manager, presented a powerpoint document on the district's budget process, the entity funds, revenues, expenditures, and the general operating budget (Exhibit A). The presentation also included the taxes collected by the district for real estate, earned income, business privilege, and investment earnings.

As previously stated by President Voit, the 2011-12 proposed budget began with the \$4 million deficit and has been adjusted to a \$2.5 million deficit at present. Other cost saving options that include furlough of staff, elimination of some programs, and 10% cuts in building and departmental budgets are now under consideration.

Public Comment

Jaclyn Bellanca, teacher and resident in Muhlenberg School District, commented on the success of the full day kindergarten program the past two years. The students in full day kindergarten are at least a half year ahead of other students in social and emotional growth. Kindergarten is the foundation for student learning.

Nancy Faust, teacher and resident in Muhlenberg School District, stated her son attended a full day kindergarten program 16 years ago. It was very beneficial for him to receive the early educational program. If the district decides not to bus students to half day kindergarten, the parents will send students to private schools rather than Muhlenberg. It would be a huge step back in time.

Frank DeMartini, parent of first grader, stated the benefit of his daughter to attend full day kindergarten here last year and receiving special education services. He is willing to pay extra in taxes to support the educational programs in the schools.

Vicki Seidel, parent of two children in the district, stated a comparison of the increased costs of her personal household and the increased costs for education. Education is more important!

Clarissa Enslin, parent, stated her concern for the budget cuts affecting students – lowering standards for education while preparing students for academic success in the future. She also suggested to reorganize the administrative chain of command and re-delegate the work load downward.

Lisa Reinert Mengel, resident, suggested a business opportunity for the district that is used in her place of employment whereby they have requested vendors to cut 5% of the costs of supplies and have been successful in obtaining these costs reductions.

Michele Karmom, resident, stated her concern for the purchases by the district, i.e. property and maintenance equipment. She is on social security disability and will not receive an increase in benefits this year or next year.

Jason Dunlop, resident, stated his concern for the elimination of bussing students in the secondary grades for next school year.

Dr. Haught responded that the district does not plan to eliminate bussing for secondary students next year.

Rod Miller, resident, stated his concern for the construction projects and the bidding process as previously discussed in the past, i.e. the cost of digital operating systems at a cost savings of \$300,000. Other concerns brought forward were the unfunded mandates, prevailing wage, the effect of property foreclosures, collection of union dues, and teacher buyouts.

Katie DiStefano, parent and graduate of Muhlenberg High School, stated her support for the music and arts programs in the school. Muhlenberg has provided wonderful school opportunities and she will support increased taxes while giving up personal expenses.

Corinne Yanes, resident and graduate of class of 94 from Muhlenberg, commented on the benefits her daughter is receiving this year in full day kindergarten. She encouraged the Board to not cut staff and to continue providing educational programs and services.

Samantha Mengel, 10th grade student, relayed to the Board the importance of the driver education program she is taking this school year. She learned a lot about safety and driving guidelines as well as the preparation for the state driver's license.

Holly Foster, resident, commented on the excellent education her daughter received in kindergarten last school year. Her concern is currently for their twin children who will begin kindergarten next school year. Her family is willing to support a tax increase and pay for children's school supplies. She questioned the bussing for half day kindergarten?

Dr. Haught responded that the district would provide bussing one way for the kindergarten students – AM students will come to school on regular assigned bus and the PM students will return home on the regular assigned bus. There would be no noon time departure or arrival bussing. Some students are walkers and parents may carpool for half day kindergarten.

John Bowman, parent of 1st and 3rd grade students, stated his concern for the Board to reconsider keeping full day kindergarten as it benefits students in academic skills. He is willing to pay extra taxes per month and pay to play sports to keep programs in school.

Karen Althouse, resident, encouraged Board to look at priorities. She is willing to pay more taxes for education. She suggested a way to generate revenue by placing advertising on buses.

Brian Huber, parent of 2010 graduate and an eleventh grade student, stated his support to keep full day kindergarten. He questioned the continuation of the graduation ceremony at the Sovereign Center and the \$20,000 cuts for athletics?

Dr. Haught responded that the district shall keep graduation at the Sovereign Center for now.

Mr. Ciatto responded that some coaching positions are being cut for next school year.

Rose Doermann, parent, stated her concern for the special education classes and instructional aides assigned to the classroom.

Dr. Haught responded that students with an IEP that need an aide will have an aide for next school year.

Ms. Doerrman also questioned the five highest paid positions in the district.

Dr. Haught responded that teachers who work 187 days per year versus the Superintendent and administrators who work 260 days per year have a difference in the per diem rate which actually has some teachers earning higher salaries than the administrators.

Mr. Voit further stated that all salaries will be frozen for next school year in all categories.

Tammy Calvaresi, parent of four children in the district, stated her support for the full day kindergarten program and music and fine arts programs. She is willing to pay for school supplies and pay to play sports.

Tracie Nanna, parent of three children in the district, stated her support of the music and art programs in the district. Students have the opportunity to earn college scholarships in music. It is an integral part of the educational program. She questioned the decision to cut two music teachers at the high school.

Mr. Voit stated that is misinformation and that four teachers would be assigned to half time.

Dr. Haught further stated that the music teachers will provide the same instruction as what students already have by consolidating their schedules. The chorus and marching band duties will be assigned to the music department to continue this program.

Ron Bornmann, parent, stated his support of the full day kindergarten program. He is willing to pay higher taxes to keep programs including music and art in the schools.

Cyndi Evans, parent of two children in the district, stated her support of the music programs. If four music teachers are cut to half time, that is a 25% cut in staff of the music department. As a music teacher there are connections in music relative to mathematics, history, etc. The students also learn about teamwork and achievement in their music disciplines.

Lori Madara, resident, questioned the school retirement system costs and if the district could provide volunteers instead of classroom aides.

Dr. Haught stated that the district must participate in the state retirement system. The district has some volunteers in the schools.

Mr. Voit added that the district shall need 2 mills in the budget to support the retirement system in two years. The Governor does not support public education and has cut funding to public education for next school year.

Honorable Judith Schwank, State Senator, stated that all school districts across the Commonwealth are being affected by decreased education funding for next year. The state legislators will be reviewing the budget items and recommending the continuation of funding for public schools. She commended the citizens for coming out to voice their opinions. The public board listens to you as taxpayers of their community. Education is the future of economic development of our state. She requested the Board submit a list of state mandates that are under-funded and a list of any litigation charges currently in the district.

Cindy Frymoyer, music teacher in the district, suggested an idea for generating potential revenue for the district – request local businesses to provide grants for education.

Lori Weidner, resident and parent in the district, stated a concern to cut teachers and thereby having larger class size. She supports raising taxes to provide a quality education.

Ivana Schlott, parent and employee of the district, stated that the administration hired each teacher and have provided effective educational programs in the district. If residency is questionable in your neighborhood contact the administration office to report the situation. Children living outside the district should not be attending Muhlenberg schools and having our taxpayers pay for their education.

Mary Plants, resident and a widow, stated she has worked in the district for twenty years. She encouraged the Board to not raise taxes unnecessarily.

Brian Dorshimer, parent and occupation as a school psychologist, stated his concern for the elimination of full day kindergarten. The half day kindergarten will have an impact of the number of special education referrals and students needing remedial services.

Stacy Carmello, parent, stated that as the youth club pays to play and would support the school sports in a pay to play program. She supports the kindergarten aides to help struggling students on a one on one basis. She questioned the costs for bussing for half day kindergarten.

Mr. Schneider responded that costs for mid-day bus runs would be for drivers and gasoline as contracted with the Berks County Intermediate Unit.

Margaret Moyer, resident, stated her concern for free and reduced lunch and if costs are provided by the district.

Dr. Haught responded that the state funds the free and reduced lunch program, not the district.

Nytza Santiago, resident and parent, stated she moved here to raise her daughters. She supports the full day kindergarten program and well as the art and music programs in the schools. She suggested a business adopt a school or fund a program initiative.

Board Comments

Rick Hoffmaster thanked the citizens for coming to the meeting. Harrisburg's Department of Education wants the districts to cut staff. They do not take pay freezes. On May 30 a rally will be held in Harrisburg regarding state funding for education.

Barbara Nagle thanked the citizens for the comments this evening. The district is bound by law regarding the amount of tax increase for next year's budget. If there is no additional funding from the state, the district will need to make some cuts. It is a difficult process to keep the tax base in line and retain valuable education. We shall take your comments into consideration.

Lee Reiniger stated he is proud of Muhlenberg School District, the township and community. Some of the budget requirements are beyond the Board's control. He would like to eliminate very few positions with the help from the state. He strongly supports the music and arts programs.

Donald Raifsnider commented that when the I.D.E.A. federal mandate was first put in place it was supported by 40% funding. Congress now funds between 8 to 12% of the costs. He encouraged citizens to write to local and state representatives on the various bills being introduced to remove mandates from public education.

Cindy Mengle stated that behind every position there is a person. The Board will try to keep as many positions as possible for educational programs.

Scott Long stated he is not an advocate for half day kindergarten. As a grandparent he has personally witnessed the benefits of the full day kindergarten program. He is an advocate for pay to play sports. He would like to pursue the adopt a school initiative with local businesses. The Board's goal is education and he appreciates all the suggestions this evening.

Terry Heckman, thanked taxpayers for attending tonight's meeting. The Board will do whatever we can to continue to provide quality educational programs in the district.

Otto Voit concluded that the as a district we shall fight our way through this budget crisis. We are all in this together and we appreciate everyone's comments this evening.

Adjourn Meeting

Moved by Raifsnider and Reiniger that the Town Hall Meeting be adjourned. Meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Yeas: DelCollo, Heckman, Hoffmaster, Long, Mengle Nagle, Raifsnider, Reiniger, Voit.
Motion carried unanimously.

Attest:

K. Scott Long
Board Secretary