



# Southern Lehigh School District

## Board of School Directors Meeting

March 10, 2014

The first regular monthly meeting of the Board of School Directors of the School District of Southern Lehigh was held at 7:35 p.m. on the above date (March 10, 2014) at Southern Lehigh High School, Center Valley, PA.

**PRESENT:** Gunkle, Lycett, Dimmig, Hayes, Lindsay, McLoughlin, Merkle, Parsons, Quigley  
**ABSENT:** None  
**OTHERS:** Christman, Melber, Lewis, Millman, Conn (Sweet Stevens, Katz & Williams), Kennedy, Buchman, Bergey, Knoll, Takacs, Jordan, Siegfried, Davidson, Farris, Farris, Sinkler (SLEA), Channel 69, Morning Call, and approximately 80 other members of the community.

### **OPENING PROCEDURES**

Mrs. Gunkle led the Board and others attending the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

The Board met in Executive Session prior to this meeting to discuss personnel and legal matters.

### **VISITORS**

Community members were acknowledged and offered the opportunity to speak when the "Elementary Building Planning" agenda item is discussed.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOVED BY** Quigley and **2<sup>ND</sup> BY** Merkle to approve the minutes of the February 24, 2014 meeting as distributed to all Board members.

**VOICE VOTE: "YES" – Unanimous – Motion Carried**  
**ABSENT: None**

### **CONSENT AGENDA**

**MOVED BY** Lycett and **2<sup>ND</sup> BY** Hayes to approve the **CONSENT AGENDA** items as follows -

Approve the bills to be paid list as of March 10, 2014 showing bills paid in the amount of \$2,337.90 and bills to be paid in the amount of \$533,753.78 for a total amount of \$536,091.68 for the General Fund and bills to be paid in the amount of \$355,855.45 for the Construction Fund;

Approve the following substitute teachers for the 2013-14 school year-

Sarah Brinckman, Elementary Ed K-6

Colleen Ritter, Elementary Ed K-6; Special Ed K-12 ;

Approve the second period of childrearing leave of Michelle Conrad, Elementary School Psychologist, for the 2014-2015 school year;

Approve unpaid leave of the following staff-

Peter Orr, Social Studies Teacher, Southern Lehigh Middle School, for March 19, 2014 (1/2 day)

Erin Bromfield, Math Teacher, Southern Lehigh High School, for April 21, 2014;

Approve the following substitute staff for the 2013-14 school year-

Margaret Hudock, Substitute Instructional Assistant, an hourly rate of \$15.31;

Approve unpaid leave of the following staff-

Joan Decker, Part-time Cafeteria Worker, Southern Lehigh High School, for March 25 through March 28, 2014

Ann Higgins, Instructional Assistant, Southern Lehigh Middle School, for May 12 through May 16, 2014

Stephanie Kauffman, Instructional Assistant, Southern Lehigh Middle School, for May 15, 2014 (3.15 hours) and May 16, 2014;

Accept the resignation of Victor Vardaro, Substitute Custodian, effective February 25, 2014;

Approve Erin Hudson as a mentor for *Tammy Terlingo*, Grade 3 Teacher, for the 2013-2014 school year, at a total stipend of \$700;

Approve the following volunteer coaches for the 2013-2014 school year-

John Bolesta MS Club Lacrosse

Clare Donato MS Club Lacrosse

Stephen Lick Boys Lacrosse.

**VOICE VOTE: "YES" – Unanimous – Motion Carried**

**ABSENT: None**

**CURRICULUM/STUDENT AND STAFF ACTIVITIES**

Mrs. Siegfried, Mr. Davidson, Mrs. Farris and Mr. Hafner reported on student and staff activities at the High School, Middle School, Intermediate School and the elementary schools.

High School report –

- "Shrek, The Musical" was sold out 3 of 5 shows and the cast and crew were outstanding. Congratulations to Mr. Wehr for directing the production.
- Thank you to board members who visited the high school on March 5.
- Congratulations to our swimmers who have beat school, district and personal records!

- Congratulations to Speech and Debate team on their success at National Qualifier events. Two members will go on to compete in Kansas this summer.
- In the beginning of April, SLHS will host a Holocaust exhibit in our library for the beginning of April. Special thanks to Mrs. Bausher for arranging this event.

### Middle School report –

#### Academics

- 3/5 - Corry Robbins, MS Librarian and Jennifer Kindt, MS Classroom 2.0 teacher, have been selected to serve as judges at the CLIU Regional Middle School Computer Fair, held at Muhlenberg College. Robbins and Kindt will join a panel of judges to evaluate middle school student projects in the following categories: Animation, Computer Fair Logo, Digital Movie, Graphic Design, Programming and Web Page Design.
- 3/7 - PMEA Festival (all day) reported that the middle school hosted over 800 guests that evening. Special thanks to Dr. Beitler and Mrs. Lebrecht who worked incredibly hard to make the evening a success.
- 3/17-3/21 - PSSA Prep Classes
- 3/24-3/27 - PSSA Reading and Math
- 3/28 Career Day – 8th grade students will have the opportunity to meet professionals from all walks of life. The students will also participate in mock interviews.
- Level I 8th grade Spanish students have established an email/pen-pal relationship with students from Colombia, South America. Spanish lessons here and English lessons there are brought to life as students exchange information in our respective second languages. Thanks to the email-exchange Web Site EPALS.com, students are making global connections on a weekly basis and sharing unique perspectives on education, daily routines, family life, community, and leisure activities.

#### Social

- 2/26 - 8th grade group photo
- 3/3 - Start of Spring Sports
- 3/4 - PTG meeting was held
- 3/21 - Spring Dance
- 3/25 - School Board Visitation

### Intermediate School report –

- Preparing for PSSA testing
- Staff looking forward to the upcoming in-service day and training on PVAAS
- Spartan Service Corp collected nearly new 50 blankets to donate to Derek's Hugs which are currently being embroidered to be distributed to children in the pediatric center at LVHC and CHOP. The next service/fundraising effort will be for the Red Cross Hero's campaign.

### Elementary schools –

- 3rd Graders and teachers in all three buildings are gearing up for the PSSA testing which begin the week of March 24.
- 3/3 - Hopewell held their 3rd Grade Spring Musical Performance. It was a knock-out performance on the 4th try as the previous three had been rescheduled due to inclement weather.

- Liberty Bell is currently in the middle of the annual reading challenge. This year's theme is the Winter Olympics. Some of the fun includes: Students earning reading medals, classroom door decorating contests during all these indoor recesses of late, and various Olympic trivia.
- 3/7 - Liberty Bell held their 3rd grade musical, "We Will Build a School" in celebration of their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This year's play was a joint production with student and staff cast. The production was written and directed by 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, Mr. Markley.
- 3/11 - Liberty Bell will be holding its Informational Session on Spanish Immersion for parents of incoming 1st Graders. The session begins at 6:30 P.M. in the library.

**MOVED BY** Quigley and **2<sup>ND</sup> BY** McLoughlin to approve Independent Study for Student #031401 through the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

**VOICE VOTE: "YES" – Unanimous – Motion Carried**  
**ABSENT: None**

**BUSINESS AND FINANCE**

**SUPPORT SERVICES**

**PERSONNEL**

**REPORTS**

**OLD BUSINESS**

**MOVED BY** McLoughlin and **2<sup>ND</sup> BY** Lycett to approve a second and final reading of the following revised policies-

- #220 Pupils: Students Expression/Distribution and Posting of Materials
- #248 Pupils: Unlawful Harassment
- #913.1 Community: Flyer/Information Distribution

**VOICE VOTE: "YES" – Unanimous – Motion Carried**  
**ABSENT: None**

**MOVED BY** Quigley and **2<sup>ND</sup> BY** McLoughlin to approve a second and final reading of the following new policy-

- #236 Pupils: Student Assistance Program

**VOICE VOTE: "YES" – Unanimous – Motion Carried**  
**ABSENT: None**

**MOVED BY** Hayes and **2<sup>ND</sup> BY** Quigley to recommend William Dellicker as a candidate for Trustee-At-Large on the Board of Trustees of the Lehigh Carbon Community College for the term July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2020.

**VOICE VOTE: "YES" – Unanimous – Motion Carried**  
**ABSENT: None**

### **Elementary Buildings Planning**

Mrs. Gunkle, Board President, offered the following remarks-

“We will proceed as follows regarding the vote tonight. First, I will make some short remarks. Then, I will open the floor so the public can provide their input. As per board policy, we will limit public comments to 3 minutes per person. In the interest of time, if your comment is the same as a comment that has already been made please just state that you share the opinion of “Joe/Jane”. After public comment, I will ask the administration to make any final comments. Finally, we will make the formal motion, have the board discussion, and take the vote.

For those who have not been with us through the entire process, let me provide some background as to how we arrived at making this decision tonight. Six years ago when I joined the board, the economy was booming and we were seeing significant amounts of growth in our district both in the business and residential sectors. Then, the Great Recession hit. Our revenues sharply declined as both Earned Income Taxes and Property Transfer Taxes plummeted. The already pending PSERS crisis was exacerbated by the market crash. We suddenly found that our district budget moved from the black to the red. At the same time, our residents were struggling and they sent a strong message to the board to keep tax increases to a minimum.

Thus, we began a period of extensive cost-cutting. In the last 5 years, we have eliminated over \$4 million from our operating budget. We eliminated 4 administrative positions including an assistant principal at the high school, assistant business manager, assistant support services director, and technology director. We eliminated 8 teaching positions by not replacing retiring teachers. This resulted in slightly larger class sizes and the elimination of the German language program. We negotiated new contracts to lower our electric, gas, and transportation costs. We implemented energy savings in our buildings ranging from installing lower energy equipment to turning down the temperatures of our buildings. We refinanced bonds to take advantage of lower interest rates. We reduced the frequency of buying new textbooks. We froze our building budgets. We migrated to electronic rather than paper distribution for anything from school board meeting agendas to student test review packets. We more tightly controlled budgets for teacher training, conferences, and student competitions. We spent millions of dollars from our fund balance to pay operating expenses that exceeded our reduced revenues.

So that was our state when Mr. Bergey, our director of support services, came to the facilities committee last January. As he does each year, Mr. Bergey presented the 10 year capital outlook for all of the facilities in our district. He raised the concern that \$7-12 million of maintenance would be required over the next 10 years at the Hopewell elementary school. To put this in perspective, Mr. Bergey has an annual budget of \$250,000 to cover maintenance for the entire district. Mr. Bergey questioned whether it made sense to spend that much money to replace or upgrade nearly every major system in the Hopewell building, including HVAC, the roof, electric, and plumbing, when it would cost only slightly more to build a brand new building.

While raising taxes to pay for a new building was certainly an option (in fact it is option E on our chart), the facilities committee did not feel that it could be the only option to be considered. The committee proceeded to brainstorm various options to solve the issue. One of the options considered was to pay for new construction without raising taxes by using the operational cost savings produced by closing either the Hopewell or Lower Milford elementary school. To many in the community, it came as a surprise that the board would consider closing a school. It should be understood that this consideration occurred only because all other cost savings measures had already been implemented over the past several years to address budget deficits. The committee discussed what criteria would be used to make the decision. A demographic study was ordered to predict growth in the district and to show population density within the district. An engineering firm that specializes in public schools was hired to provide detailed estimates of the expected costs of repairing both Hopewell and Lower Milford schools. The administration was asked to assess the educational impact, the cost and/or savings, and the student capacity of the various options.

The committee understood that a decision of this magnitude would be made by the full board and that it would be critical to involve the entire community in the discussion as soon as possible. As a result, the very first meeting on August 28, 2013 to present the data to the full board was broadly advertised to the parents and the community. A significant effort was made to keep this entire process open and transparent to the public. All discussions took place at public meetings. All material that was provided to the board to make this decision was provided to the public on the district web site. At each board meeting, the public was given the opportunity to make comments and to ask questions and many have taken advantage of that opportunity. Based on questions from the board and the community, additional information was gathered and presented on September 23, 2013. This information included details about transportation, professional research on the educational impact of school size, and architectural plans to expand Lower Milford and Liberty Bell. As requested, tours of Lower Milford and Hopewell were provided to the officials of the local municipalities. Answers to frequently asked questions were collated and posted on the district web site. On October 24, 2013, as required by school law, a public hearing was held to present the information gathered and the options being considered for the elementary school configuration.

Tonight the board will vote on what option will be chosen. In January, the board discussed how this vote would be taken. That process was finalized by a board vote at the February 10, 2014 board meeting. The purpose of this process is to ensure that each board member can vote in favor of the option that he/she supports while at the same time providing a public record of that vote. The procedure is that all board members will receive a written ballot that includes their name and the list of options. They will mark their first choice on the ballot and submit that ballot to the board secretary. The board secretary will then read all the votes into the record. If a simple majority votes for a single option, then that option will be passed. If a simple majority is not reached on the first vote, the option(s) receiving the least amount of votes will be eliminated. Then a voice roll call will be taken for the remaining options. This process will repeat until a simple majority vote for a single option is reached.

There has been a lot of passion and earnest discussion revolving around this topic. I would like to thank the public for their many thoughtful comments and incisive questions; we have listened to your input and greatly appreciate your participation in this discussion. I would like to thank the administration, particularly Mr. Bergey and his team, Mr. Melber, and Mrs. Christman, for their significant efforts in gathering answers to all of our questions; they have done their utmost to provide us with all the data that we need to make an informed decision. I would like to thank my fellow board members for their efforts to ask the right questions and to participate in useful discussions as we tried to find the best overall solution. I know that each board member has given this matter a lot of consideration and will vote for the option that he/she believes will best balance the needs of our students, our taxpayers, and our community.”

The following community members addressed the Board regarding Elementary Buildings Planning-

Mr. Lowell Linde, Lower Milford resident and former school board member, spoke in support to keep Lower Milford Elementary School open.

Mrs. Donna Wright, Lower Milford Township Board of Supervisors, spoke in support to keep Lower Milford Elementary School open.

Ms. Amanda Robbins, concerned that board members were not clear on all of the details under all of the options.

Mr. Lycett clarified that his question that Ms. Robbins was referring to was a clarification in the wording of the motion and not details of the actual option.

After confirming that there was no additional visitor comments, Board members were instructed to cast their vote on written ballots. The following list of options was included on each ballot:-

Option B: Repair Lower Milford and demolish and close Hopewell, redistributing students to Lower Milford and Liberty Bell, for about \$3.5 million.

- Student capacity only 586 (current enrollment about 830)
- Note: this would require students to be moved to other buildings- either the IS or the MS- (Administration does not recommend due to long-term curricular disruptions)
- Possible expansion in future to LM and LB
- Net annual savings estimated at \$350K
- No additional cost to taxpayers unless something changes in future

Option B1: Demolish and close Hopewell and build additions to Lower Milford and Liberty Bell, for about \$12 Million

- Student capacity 950
- No possible expansion for future
- Net annual savings estimated at \$50K
- No additional cost to taxpayers unless something changes in future

Option D: Demolish Hopewell, build a school (52,000 sq. ft.) on the property for about \$15.7 million and close Lower Milford, redistributing students to Hopewell and Liberty Bell.

- Student capacity only 688- possibly more to accommodate current enrollment with design efficiencies (current enrollment about 830, so without building design efficiencies, this option may not accommodate current enrollment)
- Possible expansion in future
- Net annual savings estimated at \$222K
- No additional cost to taxpayers

Option D1: Demolish Hopewell, build a larger school (57,000 sq. ft.) on the property for about \$17.75 million and close Lower Milford, redistributing students to Hopewell and Liberty Bell.

- Student capacity 950
- Possible expansion in future
- Net annual savings estimated at \$145K
- No additional cost to taxpayers

Option D2: Demolish Hopewell, build an optimum sized school (61,000 sq. ft.) on the property for about \$19 million and close Lower Milford, redistributing students to Hopewell and Liberty Bell.

- Student capacity 950
- Possible expansion in future
- Net annual savings estimated at \$99K
- No additional cost to taxpayers

Option E: Demolish Hopewell, build a new smaller school on the property and repair Lower Milford for about \$17 million. This option keeps all 3 schools open.

- Student capacity 930
- Possible expansion in future
- Net annual cost \$500K
- \$110.22 additional cost annually to taxpayers



Ballots were then collected by the Board Secretary, votes tallied and a roll call vote confirmed each board member's vote. In addition to the paper ballot, the votes were confirmed by the Board Secretary and Attorney David Conn, Sweet, Stevens, Katz and Williams as follows-

Jeffrey Dimmig-Option D1

Corinne Gunkle-Option D1

William Hayes-Option D1

James Lindsay-Option D1

William Lycett-Option E

Thomas McLoughlin-Option D1

Brian Merkle-Option D1

John Quigley-Option B

Kathleen Parsons-Option E

**MOVED BY** Quigley and **2<sup>ND</sup> BY** McLoughlin to approve Option D1-Demolish Hopewell, build a larger school on the property for about \$1775 million and close Lower Milford, redistributing students to Hopewell and Liberty Bell Elementary schools.

**VOICE VOTE: "YES" – Dimmig, Gunkle, Hayes, Lindsay, McLoughlin, Merkle –  
Motion Carried  
"NO" – Lycett, Quigley, Parsons  
ABSENT: None**

**NEW BUSINESS**

**MOVED BY** Quigley and **2<sup>ND</sup> BY** Hayes to approve the proposed 2014-2015 School District Calendar as presented, but amended to reflect that the order of inclement weather days will change to utilized designated holidays first instead of days at the end of the school year first.

There was Board discussion and the order of make-up days adjusted to start with holidays designated as "possible make-up days" and then adding days at the end of the school year.

**VOICE VOTE: "YES" – Unanimous – Motion Carried  
ABSENT: None**

**MOVED BY** Quigley and **2<sup>ND</sup> BY** Merkle to approve Act 80 days for November 17-21, 2014 for elementary school conferences, November 18-21, 2014 for middle school conferences, November 20, 2014 for high school conferences; October 13, 14, 2014 and March 13, 2015 for teacher in-service; early dismissal on February 12, 2015 and May 22, 2015 for teacher in-service and half-day early dismissal for students on the last day of school.

**VOICE VOTE: “YES” – Unanimous – Motion Carried**  
**ABSENT: None**

**MOVED BY** Quigley and **2<sup>ND</sup> BY** Parsons to approve the resolution to identify Official Local School District holidays in accordance with PDE Basic Education Circular (BEC).

**VOICE VOTE: “YES” – Unanimous – Motion Carried**  
**ABSENT: None**

Mr. Dimmig suggested that the Administration reach out to Upper Saucon Township if necessary regarding utilization of land in order to build the new Hopewell Elementary School while the existing Hopewell Elementary School remains prior to demolition.

**COMMUNICATIONS**

**VISITORS**

None.

**MOVED BY** Quigley and **2<sup>nd</sup> BY** Merkle to adjourn the meeting.

**VOICE VOTE: “YES” - Unanimous - Motion Carried**  
**ABSENT: None**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

**ATTEST:** \_\_\_\_\_ Board Secretary