

10-16-17  
School Board President's Report  
Mary Birks

**PTA Recognition**

The Mt. Lebanon School District has a strong tradition of parent involvement in our schools thanks in large part to our PTAs. First organized on October 22, 1935, Mt. Lebanon PTAs have been key partners in supporting our mission to provide the best education possible for each and every student. On behalf of the students, staff and Board of School Directors, I would like to thank all of the PTA volunteers, and in particular the PTA presidents, who work tirelessly and volunteer thousands of hours each year to make our schools a better place for students and staff. I am pleased to introduce the PTA presidents for the 2017-2018 school year. Please step forward when I call your name:

**Council PTA President- Moira Aulbach**

**High School - Julie Maselko**

**Jefferson Middle- Julie Smith**

**Mellon Middle - Melissa Bailey**

**Foster - Mary Ellen Donato**

**Hoover - Cristina Battaglia**

**Jefferson - Christine Neavin**

**Lincoln-Tracy Adam**

**Markham-Sue Galeone**

**Howe - Joyce Devine**

**Washington - Natalie Kukla**

I am exceptionally proud to have such a sensational leadership team, dedicated to the mission of our district. Our school principals are incredible professionals, educational leaders at individual schools, who also step up and provide expertise in a myriad of ways

throughout our district; Mr. Marciniak has made it possible for us to look 5 years or more into the future to determine the capital needs of our district, ensuring funding for regular maintenance as well as big ticket items such as roofs. Ms. Bowman worked tirelessly to get the Dashboard off the ground years ago, facilitating clearer communication between the district and parents; she and Mr. Stengel have partnered on multiple projects, including the updated website. And Mr. Stengel works with our teachers and teams of students in order to make technology work for them. His energy and passion for utilization of technology in the classroom is second to none. In Ms. Devine, we have a professional in HR that is second to none. I hear from administrators and faculty alike about her kindness and her demeanor that puts everyone at ease. Ms. Klein, director of business, manages the finances of this district to ensure that we are able to bring in the most talented teachers to teach our students. Her professional reputation goes beyond the borders of the MTL SD. Both of our assistant superintendents, Dr. Irvin in elementary ed., and Dr. Davis in secondary, make data driven decisions that enhance education in every classroom and for each and every student. Working alongside Dr. Steinhauer, they are our curriculum experts and they lead a team whose only focus is on student learning. Dr. Steinhauer empowers his leaders to do great things, while challenging himself each and every year to be a better superintendent, becoming more informed, identifying new curriculum ideas for the district's student, bringing in innovation, such as the social emotional learning we are seeing throughout our district. He carefully balances the expectations of parents with the financial realities of our community.

I recently found a great John Irving quote: "Don't forget this, too: Rumors aren't interested in the unsensational story; rumors don't care what's true."

I'm here this evening to dispel the rumors that don't care what's true.

I'd like to begin with the Capital Campaign, which was the School Board's initiative to provide a vehicle by which interested parties could contribute to the School District. We saw the lack of funding coming from the state, and the cuts that were seemingly indiscriminate. We knew that it was expected that we continue offering innovative programs throughout the district, provide for capital improvements not covered in the facilities plan as well as improvements throughout all departments. Pledges could be donor designated funds, such as the incredible gifts by Mr. McMurray, the Conovers and the Waltons, or they could be used for other items that might not otherwise be covered in the budget, which is how many others directed their donation and pledges.

There is nothing untoward going on with the Capital Campaign. There are individuals in this community who have no knowledge or understanding, or the desire to understand, the concept of Development for this district. These queries, nearly 40 RTK requests since the beginning of September, have simply yielded more rumors from those interested in politicizing the Capital Campaign, carrying assumptions and accusations that are simply false. Development takes a lot of time; we recently heard from a donor that his gift to his university has been 45 years in the making. And it takes time to develop relationships and cultivate interest in providing funding to a public school.

We recently received information that Ms. Jan Klein's expertise is being called into question by some of the same individuals who have no expertise in development or in public school accounting, least of all, Government Accounting Standards.

Ms. Klein has led this district's business office for over 35 years; it is due to her level of integrity and operating at the highest professional standards, that this school district was awarded an Aa1 rating from Moody's which enabled the district to obtain an exceptional bond refinancing in the spring. We utilized those savings for the installation of air conditioning in all 7 elementary schools and both middle schools.

Our reserves are strong because of her conservative budgeting; we have not had to borrow money when the state does not send us our allocation, which many districts had to do in order to keep their doors open and their teachers paid.

It is thanks to Dr. Steinhauer, and the finance team, led by Ms. Klein, that we were able to find enough savings that we had a zero mil increase this year. Not one person on this Board could have found the savings in our extensive budget; that came from Ms. Klein and Dr. Steinhauer. To assert anything other than this is absurd.

Additionally, we are audited each and every year, with no findings, by an outside auditor. We post an RFP every 3 years for an auditor, and after review of the firms submitting proposals, we have brought in Maher Duessel each time. And this has been accomplished by multiple boards, not just those in recent history. We are due for another RFP in 2018, and I'm certain the board will review the proposals and will do its due diligence before voting on the appropriate firm.

I always had an appreciation for Ms. Klein's expertise, having attended school board meeting for 13 years before running for this seat. But the first occasion when I realized how respected Ms. Klein is outside of our little bubble, was at my first PSBA conference I attended. As I settled into my first workshop, a gentleman sat down next to me and we exchanged pleasantries. He was a finance director from the other side of the state. "Is Jan Klein still at MTL?" he asked. And when I said 'yes,' he went on to tell me that he was trained by Ms. Klein as a business manager and he learned more from her than he did from anyone else. "You are very lucky to have her still there." I concurred.

I've heard from finance directors and superintendents alike, who took her budgeting class at CMU and raved about her depth and breadth of abilities and overall knowledge. Her reputation is rock solid with people in the business of school financing who understand the challenges of this aspect of school districts.

As the Board Chair for Allegheny County Schools Health Insurance Consortium, Ms. Klein has worked tirelessly to save districts AND employees hundreds of thousands of dollars in health care costs. She works with a team that includes both management and labor in an effort to keep costs down for its member districts and their employees. She is both respected and renowned for her thorough and challenging questions to vendors and to the insurance companies. This model is recognized throughout the entire state.

She is called upon to present at state and national conferences, professional organizations such as PASBO, serving as President, as well as reported before legislative panels and with other school districts, deserving each and every accolade earned for her financial acumen and her cutting edge work with ACSHIC.

Her budgets have earned the Meritorious Budget Award from the Association of School Business Officials International for 22 years and she has won the Association of School Business Officials International Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 32nd year in a row for excellence in financial reporting and accountability for its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. In short, Ms. Klein leads a professional business office for our community, this district and its students; the consummate professional, she continuously looks for ways to save money for us. If anyone embodies our district's guiding principle of "Continuous Improvement," it is surely Jan Klein.

In years' past, we've had board members elected with a laundry list of business expertise who ran for the board in an effort to run the district like their business. Try as they might, they discovered you cannot run a school district like a business. The accounting methodology is different, there are unfunded and funded mandates; there is a slew of government reporting.

I truly understand that most people in our community and those that serve on the board are not experts in this field; that is why we hire a competent Director of Business, and that is Ms. Klein in every respect.

While those of us who are public officials certainly understand that our position exposes us to the spotlight of criticism, and at times, reckless claims intended to harm, we refuse to accept such unjustified and unsubstantiated treatment of our employees. Harassment and defamation of character have no place with our professional staff and will not go unanswered.