

Mary Birks  
School Board President's Report  
Jan. 16, 2017

### **PTA Thank you**

Welcome back everyone, and Happy New Year to all. January is School Board Recognition month, and I'd like to begin by thanking the representatives of the PTA for the lovely reception held earlier this evening, honoring our Board. We truly value the unique relationship which has developed between the District and the PTA over decades of dedicated work by thousands of volunteers. Those volunteers make invaluable contributions to the day-to-day learning in the classrooms throughout the District and also add to a variety of extracurricular activities for all district students. Thanks for all you do for our students-and the delicious desserts as well!

### **School Calendar**

Tonight we will be approving the school calendar for the 2017-2018 School year. Due to the air conditioning work scheduled to take place over the summer, the administration proposed that the first day of school for students be held after Labor Day on September 5th to allow the contractors as much time as possible to complete the installation in the seven elementary and two middle schools.

One of the highlights of next year's calendar is the inclusion of a half day for students on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, November 22. Spring Recess will be held from March 28 to April 2, High School Commencement is scheduled for June 13, with the last day of school is set for June 14. All snow days are added at the end of the year, if needed. I'd like to thank Dr. Steinhauer, and Drs. Davis and Irvin for their much-appreciated input in this complicated, multi-layered process.

### **Preliminary Budget**

This evening, we will also be voting on a preliminary budget for next year. The key word here is preliminary. I'd actually call it the preliminary, preliminary budget. We are required

by law to pass this budget before the end of January. All school districts across the state of Pennsylvania are engaged in this same exercise. There are many items that remain unknown. A couple of the larger items include not having a State Budget from Harrisburg, which would give us an idea of funding, as well as not knowing all of our staffing needs for classes for 2017-18.

For that reason, and in order to give us the maximum flexibility to do what is best for the District, we vote on this preliminary budget which enables the district to utilize all applicable (Act One) exceptions. The millage rate posted in the preliminary budget does not require the board to raise taxes to that level; we will once again do our due diligence to do everything possible to minimize the tax burden on our residents. The district mission to provide the best education possible for each and every student requires us to do so in a fiscally responsible manner. Please stay tuned as we continue our discussions over the next several months.

### **Unity Rally**

I would like to publicly thank Representative Dan Miller and his staff for organizing the Unity Rally which took place on December 18th. I'd also like to thank the planning committee for their ideas and their commitment to this event. One of our clergy stated something that stayed with many of us. I'll paraphrase here: "Our kids are light years ahead of all of us on these matters; they are just looking for us to have their backs." Thank you to all who were in attendance, and many others who supported the rally but were unable to attend.

While it was my privilege to speak on behalf of the Board, as Representative Miller stated, the rally could not have occurred without the involvement of the School District. Many thanks to Dr. Tim Steinhauer, Mrs. Cissy Bowman, Mr. Jeff Kaiser (facilities), Mr. Ethan La Placa (Chamber Choir Director), the extremely talented Mt. Lebanon High School Chamber Choir, and in my opinion, thanks especially to the absolute rock stars of

the event, representing the High School Gay Straight Alliance, President Emmie D'Amico, and Mt. Lebanon High School student and junior commissioner, Varsha Venugopa. We are very proud of their work as champions for equity and inclusion at our high school and beyond.

### **High School Cabaret**

My husband and I were able to attend the High School Chamber Choir's Cabaret on January 4th. It is always astonishing how professionally these young men and women perform. There were many toes tapping out the rhythm to the show tunes. Thank you to Mr. LaPlaca and his team for supporting each performance with an instrumental accompaniment; it was exceptional.