

Mt. Lebanon School District
School Board President Report – February 22, 2016
Lawrence M. Lebowitz

Good evening. During our meeting earlier in the month, the Board began our discussions regarding installing air conditioning in our elementary and middle schools. This has been a topic of conversation in our community for the past many years and something which, I believe we all agree, we ultimately need to do. The questions, though, are when we will do it, how we will do it and, of course, how we will pay for it.

As to how we will do so, and when completing the elementary school renovations several years back, the Board then had the foresight to spend significant dollars to put the necessary infrastructure in place so that the costs would be reduced when the equipment was actually installed. That said, and as we learned two weeks ago and as further refined in the materials provided by Mr. Marciniak this week, there is of course a cost both in terms of equipment and annual operating/maintenance cost. More specifically, and utilizing building chillers (which was contemplated when the schools were renovated), the equipment cost for our seven elementary schools will be approximately \$3 million (spread out across approximately five years) and annual operating costs (again only for the elementary schools) would be approximately \$90,000 per year. While, to date, the information provided has suggested proceeding with a turn-key agreement with Trane, Inc. (utilizing “performance contracting”), we also have the option of using other vendors and/or engaging the services of an architecture/engineering team using the traditional design-bid-build approach.

Regardless of how we do it, the next question is how we will pay for it. As to the equipment component (which, as noted, will be approximately \$3 million for the elementary school and, adding the middle schools, approximately \$4.25 million), this will come from our Capital Account and can be spread out over the life of the project (which we estimate will be five years). The annual operating cost (which, again, will be approximately \$90,000 for the elementary schools and, adding the middle schools, approximately \$130,000) will be paid out of our General Fund Budget.

With this information in mind, tonight's discussion will focus on the final issue, i.e., when to undertake this project. On one hand, and as I am sure will be discussed, the High School project has not yet been completed, and there are certainly some benefits to waiting to proceed on a new project until this has occurred. On the other hand, and particularly with the significant benefit of savings realized through our various bond refinancings over the next several years, this appears to be a good time to proceed. Finally, and as is always the case, we need to evaluate this issue by placing our primary focus on taking care of our children while simultaneously proceeding in a fiscally responsible manner. I look forward to our discussion later this evening.

This past week Dr. Steinhauer met with the State Auditor who recently conducted an audit of our Food Service Program. I am pleased to report that we received very high marks from the State, and I want to congratulate both our Food Service Department and Finance Department for their hard work in the successful implementation of the new Food Service regulations.

Largely due to these and other successes, Tazeen Chowdhury, the Director of our Food Service Department, was invited by the Pew Charitable Trust to travel to Washington, DC on February 22 and 23 to meet with Pennsylvania's Congressional Representatives in support of efforts to improve school nutrition. In so doing, Ms. Chowdhury will provide an example of how the Mt. Lebanon School District is successfully providing students with healthier food options and once again evidencing our District as being an example to others in both Pennsylvania and nationwide.

Talking about trips, and following on my visits to all seven elementary schools last year, I had the pleasure of visiting my alma mater, Jefferson Middle School, on February 5, In conjunction with Principal Szessterniak and Dr. Davis, I had the opportunity to observe teachers and students in 13 different classrooms across all three grades. Some of the exciting things that I witnessed included:

- Students from Mr. Hogel’s 8th grade Math Class participating in a STEM competition in which representatives of 10 different schools were paired with a manufacturing company and visited their particular facility in December. JMS students, for their part, were partnered with Caterpillar Global Mining in Houston, PA, and our students traveled to their CAT facility on December 2nd. As our new website just recently announced, the video prepared by our students won the award for Best Marketing Plan. What a terrific accomplishment and great “hands-on” learning opportunity for these students!
- Family Consumer Science, which is now an 8th grade elective, is embarking on a new project funded by the MLFE (at Mellon) and an Alcoa grant (at JMS). The course is following a “farm to table” concept where the students are going to grow the foods that they will ultimately use in their own cooking.
- Connected to the FCS Project, Mr. Champion’s Technology and Engineering class was researching GMO (Genetically Modified Organism) seeds vs. organic seeds and preparing for a debate regarding what decisions our society needs to make to grow food that is safe and nutrient rich for future generations. This activity is part of a larger and very important theme of study across the District—namely, the societal impact of technology.

Thanks again to Principal Szesterniak, all of the teachers and our awesome students at Jefferson Middle School for my visit. I look forward to a similar experience at Mellon in early March.

Tonight I am pleased to announce that our Extra Mile Award winner is Ms. Anisha Gupta. Anisha is an Information Technology Specialist who provides end-user support to District students, faculty and staff. According to Technology Director Chris Stengal: “Anisha has set the standard for customer service since her first

day in the District by always going the extra mile with every work order she services. Never closing a work order until she is satisfied that the person is satisfied . . . not just the resolution of the technological issue which initially triggered the work request. On a daily basis, Anisha models the behavior that all of us in the Technology Department aspire to reach.” On behalf of the School Board, I want to thank Ms. Gupta for her tireless efforts in solving technology issues for our faculty, staff and students and congratulate her by presenting the Extra Mile Award.

Finally, it’s that time of year to consider nominating an outstanding graduate of Mt. Lebanon High School for our Great Alumni Award. Recipients of this award are selected based on exceptional work in at least one of the following areas: improvement in the lives of others, involvement in community service or achievement in a professional field. The nomination form can be found at www.mtlsd.org/alumni and the deadline for submission is April 15.

Thank you very much.