

Mt. Lebanon School District
School Board President Report – January 2016
Lawrence M. Lebowitz

Good evening and happy and healthy New Year to all.

Let me begin my report by thanking the representatives of the PTA for the nice reception earlier this evening. All of us on the Board truly appreciate the wonderful working relationship which the District has (and has had for many years) with the PTA. Their volunteers make invaluable contributions to not only the day-to-day learning in the classrooms throughout the District but, also, in a variety of extracurricular activities as well. Thanks for all you do for your kids—and the delicious desserts as well!

As you know, today we remember and celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King. Of his many messages, one which is particularly applicable to our efforts is the need to treat everyone with respect and be inclusive in our day-to-day affairs. In that regard, I was so pleased to read over the weekend about how our English as Second Language (ESL) Program has expanded. I learned that we currently have more than 100 ESL students, and that the diversity of our student body is unlike anything we have ever witnessed. For this academic year alone, we have students in our program who speak the following primary languages: Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Tagalog (a Filipino dialect), Tamil, Telugu, Bengali,

Turkish, Ewe, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Nepali, Hindi, Farsi, Thai, French, Spanish, Uzbek, Gujarati, Korean, Bisaya and, finally, a dialect of Ahiska Turkish that apparently posed quite a challenge even to our translation service! Thank you to all of the people who support our ESL Program which, again, honors the legacy of Dr. King and allows us to embrace diversity in our District.

This evening we will be voting on two very important issues. The first is the school calendar for next year. As I mentioned in my comments last week, this is a topic on which we received considerable input from members throughout the community. The feedback, which really was on all sides of the various issues, was extremely helpful and much appreciated by each and every member of the Board. Our vote tonight on the high school calendar, which begins the school year on August 29th, has a four-day (as opposed to three-day) spring break and ends on Friday, June 9th is, we believe, a very reasonable compromise and one which will hopefully be well received by the large majority of the families in our District. Thanks to the teachers and the administrators (and, in particular, Drs. Davis and Irvin) for their much-appreciated input in this process.

We will also be voting on a preliminary budget for next year. The key word here is preliminary. This is the case because, as we have discussed for the past many months, we still do not have a State Budget from Harrisburg rendering it absolutely impossible to

know what our final numbers will be. For that reason, and so as to give us the maximum flexibility to do what is best for the District, we will be voting on a preliminary budget allowing us to take advantage of all applicable (Act One) exceptions. Again, this by no means requires or even indicates that we will raise taxes let alone do so up to the level of the index and exceptions. To the contrary, and as is the case every year, we will do everything possible to minimize the tax burden on our residents while at the same time ensuring the excellence of our academic and extracurricular programs. Please stay tuned as we continue our discussions over the next several months.

Finally, I am pleased to have not one but two recipients of our Extra Mile Award. As started several years ago by then-President Posti, this award recognizes District employees who go “above and beyond” in their efforts on behalf of the District and our children. This is certainly the case with this month’s recipients, Bonnie Lackner and Maria Olivo, from our Finance Department.

With the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), numerous requirements for reporting to both the IRS as well as our employees were imposed on the District. Bonnie and Maria not only had to learn about the details of the law, but also to understand complicated IRS coding and language so that our District would be in compliance. As they learned and began to plan what was needed to meet the requirements, timelines and definitions changed

without much notice causing a significant amount of extra work. In fact, and because of all of these changes and complexities, Bonnie and Maria set up and implemented a tracking system to ensure not only that our nearly 1,000 employees were covered but, also, that the District was in compliance. In fact, and because of their “home-grown expertise,” both Bonnie and Maria became a resource for other School Districts faced with these same challenges. This was, by the way, all work which was in addition to the normal duties which they have been performing so well for many years.

Therefore, and in recognition of their extraordinary efforts to keep abreast of the law and to ensure our ongoing compliance, I am pleased to recognize both Bonnie Lackner and Maria Olivo for the Extra Mile Award. Congratulations!