

Mt. Lebanon School District
School Board President Report – November 16, 2015
Lawrence M. Lebowitz

Good evening. Let me begin by following up on the Board's discussion last week regarding the ongoing budget discussions in Harrisburg and, more specifically, how that debate could impact our District. A proposal has been made to help break the stalemate which would require all School Districts in Pennsylvania to place a referendum question on the ballot for any and all property tax increases. As such, it would amend Act 1 of 2006 by eliminating the index and the very limited exceptions for School Boards to raise taxes for, among other things, ongoing pension obligations, special education and school construction.

While we certainly understand the need for compromise to reach an agreement on the budget, eliminating these exceptions is simply a bad idea which would undoubtedly adversely affect not only the Mt. Lebanon School District but each and every School District in Pennsylvania. The bottom line is that, even if we were to completely eliminate additional spending on our ongoing academic and extracurricular programs, we would have significant increases in expenses based on (again by way of example) our ongoing pension obligations and needs of our Special Education students. Our inability to raise taxes without going to referendum simply to meet these needs would absolutely "tie our hands" and force us to cut programs in order to make the necessary payments. In so

doing, we would have no choice but to take the exact steps that we fight every year to avoid having to do. The nine of us on the School Board, along with our excellent administrative team, know far better than legislators in Harrisburg what our District and our children need, and we simply cannot accept having this control taken out of our hands. Dr. Steinhauer and I recently wrote a letter to this effect, and I urge each and every one of you to contact our state legislators to let them know how important this issue is and why getting rid of the Act 1 exceptions (which, again, are already very limited) is a terrible idea that will hurt our District and children for years to come.

On a more positive note (!), let me take a minute to congratulate our many students who have represented Mt. Lebanon so well in the fine arts, performing arts and athletics over the past three months. As to the fine and performing arts, we have already enjoyed the Fine Arts String Festival, the High School Marching Band Festival, the High School Chorus Concert, the Mt. Lebanon High School Bands in Review Concert as well as (just this past weekend) the Theatre Company productions of “Fantastic Mr. Fox” and “James and the Giant Peach.” I am happy to say that we are not yet finished in that next month we all have the pleasure of seeing the High School Band Concert (December 2), the High School Orchestra Concert (December 3), the High School Holiday Show (December 10) and, finally, the High School Percussion Ensemble

(December 17, 18 and 19). Please try to attend one or more of these great shows.

As to our sports teams, and as I have the honor of telling them personally tomorrow night during the Fall Sports Recognition Ceremony, both our boys and girls teams represented our school and community so well. In particular, our Boys and Girls Cross Country Teams, our Football Team, our Boys Golf Team, Girls Soccer Team and our Girls Tennis Team had excellent years. And we certainly cannot forget our Middle School and Elementary School children who have worked equally hard and also made us proud with their many accomplishments in both performing arts and athletics (not to mention academics). We heartily congratulate and thank each and every one of our students, their teachers and their coaches for a great fall season and thank you for your hard work.

Talking about hard work, this is now my opportunity (and an opportunity for my fellow Board members) to thank our two departing School Board members, Dale Ostergaard and Ed Kubit. Beginning with Dale, this is a “do-over” in that we all had the opportunity to thank him last year at this time when he thought that he was done being a School Board Director. Well, Dale—not so fast! I am so pleased and thankful that Dale was willing to return to the Board earlier this year and thank him for once again contributing his time and many talents to the Board over the past

10 months. As Mrs. Cappucci and others said last year, Dale provides the Board (and the community) with thoughtful, reasoned input which has been absolutely invaluable in the many difficult decisions which we have had to make this year and have made during his previous tenure on the Board. And Dale—don't get too complacent in your "retirement" from the Board because you never know when I may call upon you again! I would now like to give my colleagues an opportunity to say a few words about Dale.

Now to Mr. Kubit. As most of you know, Ed has completed two full terms (or eight years) of exemplary and honorable service to our children and community. He has always been focused on one thing and one thing only—doing the best that he and we can for our children. At certain times during his tenure, this has not been particularly easy. For example, and as I mentioned in my remarks at the Grand Opening Celebration for our High School, it was Mr. Kubit (in his role as Board President) who "took the heat" and spearheaded the tax increase which was absolutely necessary to get our High School Renovation Project off the ground. It wasn't easy but Ed knew that it had to be done and did what was necessary to make it happen. I want to personally thank Ed not only for the vision which he demonstrated during his leadership but, also, for all of the contributions that that he has made during the past eight years. I also want to thank him for his friendship which has been very meaningful to me and truly an "added benefit" of being on the

Board together. Again, let me give my colleagues an opportunity to say their “thank yous” to Ed as well.

As a token of our collective appreciation for both Dale’s and Ed’s work on the Board and tremendous contributions to our community and children for these many years, we have a small token of appreciation which I will now present.

Finally, and speaking of giving thanks, Thanksgiving holiday is most certainly an appropriate time to look back on the past year and be thankful for what we have accomplished and the people that enabled us to do so. In that spirit, let me thank my fellow Board members, our administrators, our teachers and, of course, our children for a wonderful year in the Mt. Lebanon School District. We have achieved a lot including, to name just two, amicably negotiating the new Bargaining Agreement with our teachers and almost completing our High School Project. These and other successes simply would not have been possible but for the tremendous effort of so many people. I again thank all of them and wish each and every one of you a happy Thanksgiving and holiday season.