

Community Budget Forum
April 5, 2011, 7 PM
Middle School Auditorium

Dr. Wright welcomed community members and explained the purpose for the meeting. During the presentation she and Leslie Frisbie shared information on how the District receives revenue and how the District plans for expenditures.

The main purpose of the meeting was to provide awareness and understanding to the community regarding the School District Budget and also gather feedback.

Mrs. Frisbie gave an explanation of Act 1 of 2006—Taxpayer Relief Act and how it changed School District funding. The Act was intended to limit real estate tax increase to the cost of living. Qualified residents (Homestead/Farmstead properties) receive a reduction in school taxes through State gaming funds. She explained ECI/SAWW = Employment Cost Index/Statewide Average Weekly Wages and how the index is calculated. The Board voted on January 19, 2011 to stay under the index allowed by the state.

Mrs. Frisbie explained referendum and noted 72% of the District is residential, 15% is farmland, and only 12% is designated as commercial properties. The burden of real estate tax falls on District homeowners compared to neighboring Districts that have 30% and higher commercial properties.

The presentation also included items that are mandated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and also things The District provides that are not mandated by the State or Federal Government. In preparation of the 2011/2012 budget, the Administration and School Board will value all programs and decide on a solution that will have the least negative impact.

Community members were given the opportunity to respond to questions by texting a keyword using their cellular phone. As the poll continued, students were asked not to respond to questions regarding taxes as they do not pay real estate tax. The survey will be posted on the District website for community members who were unable to attend the meeting and for those were unable to participate in the text poll.

Dr. Wright asked for questions and comments and reminded the public of the three-minute time limit and to be courteous and respectful of others.

Anna Gilgoff, high school teacher, commented on the voting process and the difficulty of families answering the poll. She felt families did not have enough time to make an informed decision when giving their responses. She spoke about the elimination of libraries and athletics. We are here for our kids, but the kids were asked not to vote for the last few questions. She stated when government makes decisions about education knowing kids cannot vote. They have no voice, so we must make a decision on their behalf. This is our school district. We are a unique community. We have to stick together and work out a plan with reason and with real value about what our kids are going to do in the future.

The next speaker noted she was appalled at the State for putting this burden on school districts. Unfortunately, we all are made to deal with it. She applauded Dr. Wright for the way the information was presented and for the modern way (texting) of getting everyone involved and everybody able to see each others opinions. This gives ideas and opinions for Administration to work with and hoped

everyone will contribute in a respectful way. She gave examples of other options such as if MS athletics needs to be cut, there still is NYAA. If kindergarten would be cut, there are preschool programs available at area daycares. There are other outlets and resolutions out there. We must all make sacrifices. She questioned the possibility of withdrawing from LCCC and how that would affect seniors who want to take classes there during their senior year.

The next speaker noted she stopped voting during the poll and found it a little offensive that things were being termed all or nothing. We are all aware there will be difficult decisions. She noted she did not see "Play to Participate" up there. (Dr. Wright noted some slides were skipped to keep things moving.) She understood the idea was to get the point across that decisions are not easy. She noted she was a Band parent and that all programs give wonderful options for our kids. We have to move forward and think about the future.

Ed Eidelman wanted others to think about the fact that these are tough times and we all understand this. Think about what decisions we make regarding the budget and what's going to happen next year or the year after. We can't think about it in the sense that these are tough times and we can come back later and make it better in two, three, or four years. It's not like a rain-out game that you can make up at the end of the year. For the kids that are in school now, they don't get these years over again, this is it. They used to say you don't want to buy a car from Detroit that came off the line the day after a holiday. We don't want to see the time when somebody, whether it a college or employers, says "We don't want the kids from Northwestern Lehigh that come off the budget years."

Ms. Patrick stated kindergarten was very important. Removing would have a negative impact. Many parents don't have a choice and can't send children to private kindergarten. She commented on NCLB, and How do we get ready for first grade?

Erin Brennan, an active member of the arts, introduced several high school seniors who will be continuing their college education and study music. She described the competitive audition process for acceptance into a college program. She hopes the District will continue music education. There is not any other form of learning for students to utilize unless they attend another school in the area. It is vital for the District to maintain music opportunities for our students. Private lessons are not economically possible for most students. Some currently receive lessons two times a week. She noted college bound seniors in music scored higher on SATs. She believes it is critical the District maintain the program and also felt the students should be able to vote on all questions in the poll.

Richard Wooley noted this was an interesting Civics lesson. He noted this is how many government issues go, pitting special interest against special interest causing unfavorable comments. He stated the 2 million dollar deficit is about 5% of the budget and should be shared sacrifices spread more evenly among the whole district. He noted he and his employees took a 25% pay cut in order to keep everyone's job. We all have the same bills to pay and must make sacrifices. The District should ask employees to make sacrifices. He would like to see equal effort, equally distributed cuts. Keep in mind as we move forward. He hoped that all groups can be reasonable. The District should try not to pit groups against each other.

Dr. Wright noted this is a sample of what she hears everyday. Her goal was to have everyone think.

Earl Supple spoke about different types of people in the District and the difficulty of having programs that you can just turn on. Dedication is necessary to keep programs going. If you attempt to stop one,

you will never get it restarted. He hopes no programs have to be cut and encouraged the District to think long term and maintain the programs. There are two sides to the economic scale. There's the income and the expenses. Property tax is the main source of income and may be the major factor of someone moving to the District or going to another district. We should not cut the programs that draw the people into the community. He asked everyone to support local business to bring more business into the District to help support the tax base. He questioned mandated costs for cyber/charter schools and are we spending dollars for student to go to cyber/charters schools. Dr. Wright said we will be required to pay 100% of the cost.

Davis Evans, a high school senior who is very active in extracurricular activities such as band, football, and Debate and Science Club. He stated an important part of and what he got the most out of his high school experience was his involvement in extracurricular activities. He felt his involvement in these activities was a major factor in his acceptance at Penn State. The value of these activities cannot be measured in dollars.

Larry Quinn, resident, expressed what he feels is wrong with the educational system. He stated how much he likes the teachers at NWLSD, and that this is the best school in the Lehigh Valley. He noted personal experiences with his own family and the things he learned about education through his family's experiences. He stated our system of government and the way the educational system is designed is broken. The problems we are facing now are only going to get worse because of the economy, now it's about whether you eat or pay taxes. If five students take money without doing anything, what would 150 students do?

Chris Morrison, high school student who was accepted at Marywood to study Music therapy on a scholarship, stated how important music is to the students. He noted instrumental lessons got "butchered" in the poll and explained how instrumental lessons have helped him since fourth grade and how music will help students in their future.

Jody Kocher, parent and educator, noted she was passionate about her subject and that the kids can't speak for themselves about the Governor's budget cuts targeting education. She used an example of using lottery proceeds for education instead of senior citizens. College students are rallying. She was happy the public given more opportunities to be informed and give input. She chose NWL as a parent, did her research, and wanted to be in this District. She is a member of the I U Flight Team. She stated how support personnel fit into the big picture. Once it's gone, it's gone, we are not going to get these things back, and this should be considered in the first.

Noah Smith, high school trumpeter, spoke on how important music and the Arts are to the success of students. It helps to create innovation and contributes to creativity. Without music and the arts contributing to our creativity, students would simply be machines that input and output data.

Ayla Schafer, middle school student, explained an activity from one of her classes where students were assigned an item (ex. technology) and tied together with string. If one activity was taken away, students were to think about how it affects the rest of the chain.

Terry Naugle, resident and retired high school math teacher, spoke about fair priorities of the poll tonight. He asked people to think beyond personal preferences if they got a chance to answer the questions again. He asked community members not to give up. It is not a done deal. He urged everyone to call or write their legislators. Let your voice be heard.

Dr. Wright will post contact information to address letters to Legislators on the website.

Dwight Henritz asked about the audit report from Gorman and Associates regarding custodial credit risk. He asked if the District funds should be invested with other institutions to get a better return on our money. Leslie Frisbie explained the District is limited in what we can invest in. There are requirements for district assets to be collateralized with any bank, including New Tripoli Bank. The District does have more money in its accounts than the FDIC insures. She reassured him New Tripoli Bank is properly secured and our money is safe.

Patty Mengel, high school teacher and former NWLSD graduate, said she was a little anxious during the voting and thought if this was her department on the list, I would be sick. Going to work as an employee, the people she interacts with every day are friends and are like family. They are all passionate about their own programs. To have to say that one program more important than the other is difficult. Knowing the financial climate that we are in, and how great we have it in this community and in this school. We don't even have locks in the lockers. This is the kind of District we have. We want to preserve what we have and she would be willing to take a salary freeze to make sure our programs stay as good as they are.

Zach, middle school band member, spoke for everyone in the middle school band. He stated the band has three different groups. Some students participate in all three. The students work very hard to present their music. He commented, if the programs are cut, does all the hard work count for anything? He asked what happens to the instruments if the programs are cut.

Curtis, a ninth grade student, stated it was his first year at this school. He went to private school before. He noted the District doesn't have the normal stereotypes. He said all groups here are interconnected. The majority of the students don't want to see anything cut. He doesn't want students to be like a robot . . . stupid and not able to express themselves. He is very interested in becoming a music educator in the future and job shadowed at another high school. Our school does not have the funding to offer the types of classes he saw. He asked the District not take away the little bit that we have. It is not really fair that other districts have an entire wing dedicated to music, while we have just one room.

Emily Gutgold, a sophomore at the high school, stated all activities by themselves measure up to the education that help supplement her time at the high school that makes her who she is and how she develops as a person. These activities should be important. Extra-curriculars are the first thing people think about when talking about making cuts, but they shouldn't be, they should be right up there. These activities supplement each other to produce a diploma that stands for more than math, science, reading and social studies.

Terri Behm said she moved to Pennsylvania and chose to come to Northwestern Lehigh School District. She chose the District because of all the wonderful things she heard from residents. The District has helped develop two wonderful young people who were able to take advantage of all the athletics, extra-curriculars and AP courses offered. She wants all children to have the same opportunities her children had and more. She asked about the \$600,000 from the Homestead and Farmstead money and asked if the community could opt out. She also asked if there were any other creative things the District was looking at. Dr. Wright explained the gaming funds and how the Homestead and Farmstead is funded.

Ben Serrecchia, Weisenberg Township resident, commented on how the District is forcing itself to make key cuts in certain areas. He is glad the District is looking at pay freezes and possible cuts to staff. His main concern is the burden of taxes. He also commented on the future burden of Lehigh County reassessing properties. There could be a significant increase in tax revenue the District will get. Taxpayers with newer residences may see an increase in taxes. This is a burden. He struggled over the last three or four years to maintain his residence. Residents are getting to the point you can only take so much. He does not want to move if his taxes become too high and it's getting to that point. He understands the District is trying to do everything possible to keep it the way it is. Spreading the burden across the taxpayers will cost him more. He asked if the District will focus on pay freezes and cuts, and is the District looking for ways to get money such as grants and other means besides what the State may be giving.

Laurie Snyder commented on some of the things proposed tonight. She should like to see the taxpayer get the very most we can out of the money we put into these children. She noted how she saves, instead of cuts back, she takes what she deems is necessary, makes it most efficient and gets the most from her money in her own household. She proposed the District do the same. There is waste in the District. We need to find the waste and cut the waste. A two million dollar shortfall may sound like a small amount in comparison to the whole. She believes that if we look, we can find where we can save that money without making drastic cuts and having unhappy children without programs. We need to work together to look at ways to make cuts and be lean. The District has a Chart of Accounts, make it available to the community so everyone can look together to find the waste. Let's make it a lean, effective school district.

Laurie George, Weisenberg Township resident, spoke about State elections coming up. The Board primary election is also coming up. She is trying to learn as much as she can about our elected officials before putting her vote behind someone. She would like to see a public debate with the candidates running for School Board where we could start to gather information to know where they stand on the issues. Is there ever a community forum? Dr. Wright suggested the League of Women Voters may be a place to start and asked community members

Kina Wehr, NWLSD graduate, commented on her educational and athletics opportunities throughout the years. She talked about how important sports were to her. She would hate to see athletics go away or anything that students are passionate about disappear, go away and slip through their fingers.

Charlie, a Pittsburgh Pirates fan, commented on how the team has struggled over the years. They basically have become a minor league team for the Yankees and the Red Sox. The parallel is that we want to make sure the decision we make doesn't have long term detrimental negative effect. We don't want Northwestern to become the minor leagues. The decisions we make over the next few years will determine that.

Mrs. Nemes offered congratulations to the music students. She would hate to see any programs cut. She asked everyone to keep in mind how important participation in extracurricular activities is to the college acceptance process.

Kermit Delong, a lifelong resident of the District, asked the District to look at other ways of bringing in revenue to the area such as the Adult Retirement Community. He stated he has paid over \$100,000 in real estate taxes over the years. We need to look at the big picture, what can we afford to have.

People can't keep paying and paying and paying. We need to look at ways to bring businesses into the District.

Dr. Wright asked everyone to think about some of the challenges we will have. Comments will be collected online on the District website. She hoped everyone left tonight's meeting with a better understanding of how we are funded what some of our challenges are. She commented, "No, I am not looking to cut programs. I'm looking to provide the best education possible for what we can afford."