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7-31-19 KJ

East Pennsboro Area School District
890 Valley Street
Enola PA 17025

July 29, 2019

Dear Dr. Dunar,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at the Act 34 hearing on July 23, 2019. It was a pleasure to meet you and I want to thank you for all the work you have done for our district.

I understand that our schools are in need of repair and updating. I fully support our schools being updated. I was pleased to hear that the HVAC/security renovations are running smoothly and that all repairs should be completed by the start of the school year. I am glad that the district and school board are finally moving forward on much needed school repairs.

However, I still feel that the money being spent to move 5th grade back to the elementary schools could be better spent on improving the schools that we currently have. There will be no gain in education value if the 5th grade is moved. Test scores and education quality will not change for the district as a whole. I feel that this move is more to free up space in the middle school for the district administration offices than it is to improve the quality of education for all EPASD students.

I also question the use of some of the rooms being proposed for the East Pennsboro Elementary. I understand the need for a new gym and special education classrooms. I see that the plans are to add two LGI rooms on the ground floor and two flexible classrooms on the first floor. From the diagrams from the Act 43 Hearing Booklet, it seems that these rooms make up a significant portion of the classroom space in the new addition. (I am looking at a very blurry copy of the plans.) That is a lot of space for room that "may be used" instead of space that will be used daily like a regular classroom. The LGI rooms are to be equitable space use at West Creek Hill. And if a need for this type of space is required (and not just because the other elementary school has them), then it should be added to the renovations. However, it seems like the flexible classrooms on the first floor will just be empty space. East Pennsboro Elementary already has a flexible classroom and the LGI rooms can fill the need for this space. Maybe a better option is to add the district administration offices to the East Pennsboro Elementary school. The classrooms in the front of the building could be move to the proposed addition and that could free up space for the district administrations offices. And in that way, the district does not have to spend money of expanding West Creek Hills and use that money for improvements that the other schools.

While the current enrollment at all schools approaching full capacity, the projections provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education project them to continuously go down in the next several years. From this chart in the Act 34 hearing booklet, one can

see that the enrollment is steadily declining from the 2011-12 school year and it projected to continue this decline. The middle school is projected to be near maximum enrollment in the 2022-23 school year and then start to decline in following years. In this peak 2022-23 school year, the project class size for kindergarten is 16% less than the largest class (6th grade) size in the middle school and shows that the projected kindergarten class size will continue to decrease in following years. Eventually, these kindergarten classes will be in the middle school. I feel that it would be a waste of taxpayer money to expand both elementary schools by moving 5th grade back to the elementary schools and have the enrollment to steadily decline (hence there will not longer be a capacity issue) while we are still paying for these renovations several years later. The Act 34 Hearing Booklet even states that the "District has its challenges as they are faced with limited funding due to tax based in recovery because of the declining commercial property value within the District footprint and lack of land available for single-family home development." Expenses go up ever year and the funding in the tax based in our district is going down, therefore believe that the district should plan wisely for any future debt. I admit that I am not a school educator or part of the school administration, but I feel that the district can renovate the middle school to accommodate the needs that it may face. It even states in the Act 34 Hearing Booklet that the middle school capacity is going down due to the proposed modifications (decrease of 50 students for capacity) and would be within capacity for the 2022-23 school year under the current configurations.

There are seats on the school board that are up for election in November, two vacant seats and three seats up for reelection. With the very narrow vote of 6-5 to move the 5th grade back to the middle school, I feel that the new school board should be the ones who vote on this issue and see it though and not be decided by those that are leaving. My concern is that if the new school board has any changes to the proposed renovations, the money spent by the old board to move forward will be wasted.

Thank you for your time and allowing me to express my concerns about the district plans to move 5th grade back to the elementary schools. I understand that this is part of the process in the Act 34 hearing and while it seems like the plans to move 5th grade back to the elementary schools are set in stone, I do appreciate that I am able to at least voice my concerns and have them on record. There were a few other people who join me in speaking against the East Pennsboro Elementary School renovations to add 5th grade to the elementary schools. Yet no one at the Act 34 hearing spoke in favor of this move. I truly believe that East Pennsboro Area School District provides a quality education and only hope that this continues for years to come.

Thank You,



Susan Kocher

Parent, Resident, and Taxpayer of the East Pennsboro Area School District