BOYERTOWN AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
Boyertown, Pennsylvania
www.boyertownasd.org

Ad-Hoc Committee for
School Board Election Plan Options

September 05, 2013, at 7:00 p.m.
Education Center, Board Room

Meeting Summary

Committee attendees: John Crossley, Barbara Hartford (by phone), Donna Usavage (chair)
Administration representative: Richard Faidley, Rob Scoboria, Dave Szablowski

Public attendance was approximately 20-25 people, in addition to other Board members in attendance (Gwen Semmens, Joe Nichols, Ruth Dierolf, Steve Elsier). The meeting was recorded by the district. Mr. Drabinsky also recorded the meeting.

The meeting was called to order at 7:21pm. After the Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence, and acceptance of the December 10, 2012 meeting summary, Donna Usavage reviewed the agenda for the meeting, pointing out that this meeting is an opportunity to discuss remaining concerns from the public regarding the committee's recommendations for region equalization and changing the election plan format.

Donna presented the process followed thus far by the committee, which reflected public input and careful research to make their recommendations. The presentation can be found on the school district website with this committee's materials.

The committee heard, summarized and addressed concerns and support for the recommendation to equalize the regions by moving Douglass Township, Montgomery County, voting precinct 1 from Region 3 to Region 1.

- Ruth Baker and Linda Curry expressed opposition to the proposal. Linda felt that the imbalance does not warrant a change at this time. Ruth expressed a concern with moving a Montgomery County precinct to Region 1 which is currently entirely a Berks County region. She felt it is important to keep a Berks County flavor. In addition, she stated that Berks and Montgomery County residents are taxed differently.

- Larry Farmer expressed support for the recommendation, pointing out that the large increase in population growth over the last 10 years in parts of Montgomery County versus stagnant growth elsewhere makes it important to consider population trends.

- Mark Drabinsky presented the Committee with 2 additional proposals for equalizing the regions. These proposals equalized the regions very well, but impacted quite a few voting precincts. The

committee expressed appreciation for presenting alternate solutions and committed to considering these carefully. The proposals will be made available to all Board members by tomorrow for review and assessment.

- Dr. Faidley reviewed the comments heard and allowed for clarification. Committee and Board members responded to the concerns as follows. According to the census, Region 3 population grew 31.8% in the past decade, with New Hanover Towship growing 48%. Region 2 grew only 7.9% and Region 1 only 3.3%. The recent PEL study commissioned by the district projected that these trends will continue but at a slower rate. These significant differences in population growth continue to make the current imbalance worse. The recommended change improves upon the region imbalance the population trends will further improve the imbalance. Ruth Dierolf expressed confusion over the numbers presented. The public was reminded that legally, County boundaries have no bearing on the region decisions. In addition, census data shows that there is very little different in per capita income between the Counties and in fact, the 3 Montgomery County municipalities in the district rank 3, 4 and 6 in per capita income among the 10 municipalities of the district. Census data shows that Douglass Township, Montgomery County, precinct 1 has a lower population density and a very similar and possibly lower per capita income than that of Region 1, thereby maintaining the rural flavor of the Region 1.

The committee heard, summarized and addressed concerns and support for the recommendation to move from the 3-region election plan format to a hybrid election plan format with 3 members elected at large and 2 members elected from within each region.

- 6 people expressed opposition to the recommendation. Ruth Baker expressed concerns about the cost and feasibility of campaigning for an at-large seat in this large geographic area. Ruth referred to data previously supplied to the committee that shows that large districts in Berks County all have 3 region voting models. She referred to Montgomery County 'champagne tastes'. John Matthews also expressed concern about the cost of campaigning for an at-large seat. Andrew Economopoulos expressed concern with hybrid proposal, saying that some research shows that at-large elections are a detriment to a minority. While this is usually a racial minority, in the case of Boyertown, it would be a detriment to the minority of senior citizens, who are more highly represented in the population of Berks County. Linda Curry expressed concern about the cost of campaigning for an at-large seat. She also shared her experience with the 2012 committee meetings and felt that the criteria developed were not supported by the hybrid model. Janet Mock saw no need for a change. Chris Neiman referred to Colebrookdale Township's preference to keep things as they are, saying that Berks County needs to have a voice. She also expressed concern about the legal fees spent to date on this initiative.

- Jill Dennin and Larry Farmer shared their favorable experience with the committee throughout 2012 and their support for the recommendation, saying the point of the Board is the interest of all of our students no matter where they are from. Jill believes the hybrid model promotes community unity and fairness. She addressed the cost of campaigning, pointing out that methods of campaigning have changed and that it is possible to find financial support for a campaign.

Larry felt that the notion of regions works against community unity, creating distinctions that don't really exist. On that note expressed concern about some of the comments heard tonight.

- Tara Renninger. stated that the sector of private workers is shrinking while continuing to fund the growing sector of public workers. She pleaded with the Board to keep this in mind as we make decisions.

- Dr. Faidley reviewed the comments heard and allowed for clarification. Committee and Board members responded to the concerns not already addressed in the presentation or by other members of the public. Donna Usavage acknowledged that she studied the information provided to the Board by Ruth Baker in March and felt it did not support the claim that having at-large seats on a Board results in Board members elected from the wealthiest most populous areas. Donna addressed the at-large campaigning expense concern by pointing out several free opportunities to campaign, such as candidate forums organized by the community and voter guides found in newspapers, developed by the community or developed by other organizations such as the League of Women Voters. Donna pointed out that most of the legal fees were spent to address the interveners' petition, which could have been avoided if both interveners had chosen to participate in the 2012 committee meetings. Several Board members expressed support heard from the community regarding this proposal providing every voter with the opportunity to provide input to 5 Board members (a majority) rather than 3.

The committee reconfirmed its commitments to the recommendations as stated. The motions will appear on the Board agenda for September 10, 2013.

Additional public comment was heard.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:04pm.