

## Politics and Economics

# Is fractured school board on the mend?

by Suzan Erem

Last November's State College Area school board election was the most contentious and expensive ever, one that removed five sitting board members in one fell swoop and brought in a majority of new members facing steep learning curves in their new roles.

They joined four veteran board members who could only wonder if they would ever be relevant again.

And since January, the school board has made headlines in the local press for its continued contentiousness over three issues: the replacement for departing member Barney Grimes, a decision that eventually went before a judge for lack of board consensus; the application by ousted board president Sue Werner to serve on a citizens advisory committee, a situation akin to, as one person put it, George Bush applying to a cabinet-level position in Barack Obama's administration; and the concession stand at the high school track, which ignited a debate that involved personal and professional attacks on district staff and at least one member of the board.

It looked like we had begun a long, painful and somewhat hopeless era. So



Gowen Roper

*Voices* invited board members to a conversation to discuss the board dynamics and members' vision for the future. All nine members accepted.

In one-on-one interviews, each board member answered the same open-ended questions. New and veteran members alike said that in their first six months, they have agreed more than disagreed, and that in the grand scheme of things, the controversies are but a few bumps in the road to what they hope is a constructive future.

Just politics? Maybe. But *Voices* demanded specifics. Almost every board member named at least one of these five areas of agreement:

- Routine business
- The interview process for hiring new staff
- Budget discussions
- The districtwide master plan process
- Graduate competency exams

We are dedicating these pages to a repre-



Ann McGlaughlin

sentative yet extensive sample of comments by board members about progress to date, obstacles, and goals for the future. Time served on the board is in parentheses after board members' names.

### Progress to date

*VOICES*: "What progress have you made in the first six months?"

New board members President Rick Madore, Ann McGlaughlin, Chris Small and Dorothea Stahl pointed to the transparency the board has instituted regarding work sessions and citizens advisory committees as the most important improvements. Veteran board members David Hutchinson, Donna Queeney and Gowen Roper mentioned, in turn, good discussions and questions, a board retreat that ended in a shared direction, and a new board that is moving in a similar direction as the former board.

In their own words:

RICK MADORE (SIX MONTHS): "We went



Chris Small

through the process of having somebody appointed. It wasn't exactly our finest hour, but the process was there to be able to take care of all those circumstances that might arise. We deliberated, we fought a little, but we came out."

DOROTHEA STAHL (SIX MONTHS): "I'm thrilled there are areas in the district that will now have air conditioning without having to wait. Some have waited for decades."

JIM PAWELCZYK (TWO MONTHS): "We've started a discussion about sustainability, how we're going to help the environment. There's a lot of interesting things happening that way."

CHRIS SMALL (SIX MONTHS): "I don't accept one of the premises that's been put out there that the board's dysfunctional. I don't believe we are. The nine of us have agreed on the next step for the master plan."

see School board, pg. 5

# Centre Hall woman elected to NOW national board

In May, Centre Hall resident Justine Andronici, co-president of the Ni-Ta-Nee chapter of the National Organization for Women, was elected to the NOW national board of directors.

Currently an associate attorney with the Washington, D.C.-based law firm Katz, Marshall & Banks, Andronici has worked in the women's movement with NARAL Pro-Choice America and the Women's Law Center of Maryland. She served as an attorney in *Betty Dukes v. Wal-Mart Stores*, the largest sex-discrimination lawsuit in history.

Andronici writes a regular column for *Ms. Magazine* and has received numerous awards, including the *Ms. Foundation's 1997 Gloria Steinem Women of Vision award*.

*Voices* talked to Andronici about the issues facing women in Centre County and across the country and what NOW is doing

Economic issues, such as pay equity, are critical. In the Centre Region, women make about 76 cents to every dollar a man makes.

locally and nationally to address them.

*VOICES*: How does a woman from rural central Pennsylvania get involved in the feminist movement?

ANDRONICI: Well, I am in sort of a hybrid position, since I am not native to the area. I grew up in New Jersey, went to college in New York, and I lived in California for a while before I moved to the D.C. area. I moved to Centre County almost two years ago, since my family is here.

I have the unique opportunity to telecommute for a D.C. firm from my home. It's a strange career path, but I am both an activist and a lawyer, though I am an activist first and foremost and my law practice is a way to be an activist.

*VOICES*: What issues do women face here in Centre County, and what is it like to try to organize around those issues?

ANDRONICI: I think women locally face the same issues as women across the country. In some ways, they are exacerbated. Women who find themselves discriminated against in the workplace have a more difficult situation here in taking action against an employer.

Economic issues, such as pay equity, are critical. In the Centre Region, women make about 76 cents to every dollar a man makes. Another issue is that women perform about 70 percent of housework, which takes time away from other pursuits.

Even the wonderful Family and Medical



Justine Andronici

Leave Act doesn't do much in the lower-income setting locally because it's not helpful to be able to take off if they can't afford to do so. These are economic justice issues that cut to the core of a woman's ability to care for herself and her family.

Reproductive justice is also a big one. I do not believe that there is a local abortion provider. Nationally, 87 percent of counties do not have one. Even if there is a local abortion provider, transportation to and

see Andronici, pg. 6

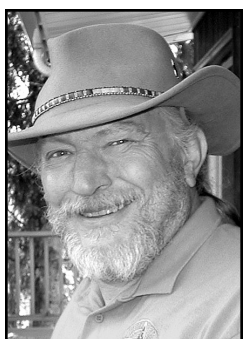
*Voices in Labor***Letter Carriers union keeps mail moving**

by John Nudge

Despite perennial jokes about “snail mail” and “going postal,” the U.S. Postal Service is one of the few government organizations that work exceptionally well. Not only is it the largest and most efficient postal service in the world; it consistently ranks as one of the most trusted government offices. This reputation is due in no small part to the hard work of letter carriers, the front-line troops of the postal service.

The National Association of Letter Carriers represents a quarter-million workers in the United States. The union enjoys an open shop membership rate of more than 90 percent, even in so-called right-to-work states. Since 1970, when a wildcat strike led by Vincent Sombrotto forced Congress to recognize the NALC as a force for letter carriers’ rights, the union has secured a wage and benefit package that is the envy of many other workers. That tradition of tough and fair bargaining continues to this day, with decent wage increases, good benefits, cost-of-living adjustments, intelligent work rules and limits on management’s ability to unfairly discipline workers.

Prior to 1970, wages for letter carriers were so poor that many of them were forced to moonlight, or apply for public assistance. Benefits were meager, as were government pensions. Since there was little protection from abusive managers, carriers were often forced to work the clock, after their shifts had ended and on their days off.



John Nudge

Times have changed, but the management mentality certainly hasn’t. Last year’s postal-reform legislation was vehemently opposed by management. The c o m p l a i n t ? Protections for union workers.

In fact, management delayed contract negotiations in order to see if the legislation became law and, if it did, to see what new things they could get away with. But the NALC fought them, and the legislation passed with management’s offensive measures omitted.

The legislation guarantees the survival and profitability of the USPS for a long time, and postal management opposed it! These are the same people who, not long ago, paid themselves large bonuses while the USPS bled red ink.

Lately, management has been handing more and more mail delivery to outside contractors.

In the State College post office, a new housing development on an existing route was contracted out as “virgin” territory. Not only was this action taken in violation of USPS rules and the National Agreement; it was revealed only after the contracts were signed. NALC Branch 1495, representing carriers in State College and Bellefonte,

voiced its grievances, and it is now in the hands of the national union, which has many such cases in its queue.

In recent years, the USPS has claimed to make positive changes in its selection and training of management candidates. Unfortunately, this has been mostly lip service, since they have failed to deal with the problem of dishonest managers with little or no knowledge of the craft, gross ineptitude and abusive personalities. This fact is one that the union seems to deal with more often than any other issue.

One bad supervisor can create problems for everyone, including the rest of the management team. Most carriers confess that their job would be nearly perfect if it weren’t for some undereducated troll making it unnecessarily difficult and stressful.

In State College and Bellefonte, we’ve had to deal with our share of these individuals. As long as they “make the numbers” and help to secure bonuses for everyone, the USPS good-old-boy network rarely disciplines incompetent managers and almost never fires them.

Even when their actions generate a flood of grievances and customer complaints, the postal service refuses to properly deal with them. The service simply moves them to other offices or promotes them to positions they are unqualified to fill. The running joke is that a manager can’t be fired unless he or she kills someone, and maybe not even then.

Fortunately for letter carriers in State

College and Bellefonte, NALC Branch 1495 remains one of the strongest and most effective branches in Pennsylvania. President Kip Naugle and his officers work hard at keeping management honest and in compliance with the National Agreement. They are very adept at working with management to resolve issues and extraordinarily tenacious when management steps over the line or refuses to negotiate in good faith.

It’s not easy. Grievance resolution is especially frustrating when the supervisors or postmaster are constrained by orders from above that force them to retreat from their obligation to settle at the lowest level. The union must then file labor charges to move the issue forward, and Kip and company have no qualms about filing them.

True, not all postal managers are ogres, but it takes just one to destroy the good working relationships that normally exist between management and craft. Bad managers destroy morale, increase the frequency of sick calls and cost the USPS millions of dollars in union time paid to stewards. When the postal service bigwigs realize their obligation to clean up the mess they have created in the management ranks, then perhaps the stewards can spend more time serving their customers than they do writing grievances.

*John Nudge is scribe and former shop steward for National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 1495. The Bellefonte resident is also a business owner and freelance writer.*

**Centre County also home to problem of homelessness**

by Eleni Psaltis and Jamie Barber

Residents of rural Pennsylvania may take pride in the idea that, unlike the growing urban centers, our communities are free of homelessness. After all, there are no overt signs of it: no people living in the streets or begging for change in front of businesses.

But the absence of visible homeless in Centre County does not mean that everyone has a place to call his or her own.

“You don’t see a lot of (homeless people), because homelessness in areas like this has a lot more to do with people living with friends or living with family members than it does with people being on the street,” said Roz Marshall, of Centre House, an emer-

gency homeless shelter in State College.

Many of Centre House’s nightly residents—who typically number around 17—are considered transitionally homeless, Marshall said.

Transitional homelessness applies to people temporarily without a home, many of whom are forced to live with relatives or friends, said Penn State professor of sociology and social demographer Barry Lee. The episodically homeless, by contrast, are homeless at several different times in their lives, and the chronically homeless spend a significant amount of their lives without a home.

Homeless people who do not show up at shelters are often not counted in homeless

surveys, said Thelma Walters, the case manager for Housing Transitions, an organization that offers numerous services to Centre County’s homeless population.

Walters said the term “transitional homelessness” is not officially used in her line of work, but she emphasized that many homeless do double up with friends or relatives.

A 2007 point-in-time survey by housing consultant Diana Myers found 40 homeless individuals in Centre County. But the survey only counted people in shelters.

In addition to doubling up, some homeless folks camp outside or sleep in their cars. According to Centre House manager Kendra Hicks, some homeless have ended up with frostbite from sleeping in cars.

Walters said the federal definition of homeless may soon be expanded to include the transitionally homeless. If the definition is changed, then organizations like Housing Transitions will be able to get more funding to help people who fall outside of the current definition, she said.

Last September, the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs voted in favor of the Community Partnership to End Homelessness Act, which would extend the definition of homelessness to include more than one family living in one house together and provide aid

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We're not fiddling while Rome is burning."

**Obstacles**

*VOICES:* "What do you see as obstacles to progress?"

These answers highlighted more differences. Small, Stahl and McGlaughlin said meetings are running too long. Madore named the three hot button issues. Veteran board members tended to address current dynamics.

In their own words:

**DAVID HUTCHINSON (FOUR YEARS):** "The larger problem is, I think, that as a group, many of them are starting with the perspective that the district is either incompetent or irresponsible financially or they're hiding something.

"If they start from that perspective then they feel a moral obligation that they should be doing something to fix that. Then they also feel a responsibility to a constituency that feels the same thing and wants them to do something about it.

"That's the biggest barrier. We have to get past that perception."

**GOWEN ROPER (TWO YEARS):** "I think there are some different perspectives on the role of the board, the level at which we should be working, the role of the board vis-a-vis the administration, and those are often where we tend to get distracted.

"When the board begins to delve down into and try to micromanage that process, we're not doing what I think we're supposed to be doing. We end up wasting time, and we potentially undermine the administration and the staff."

**DONNA QUEENEY (19 YEARS):** "I think the biggest obstacle is what I perceive as the very strong animosity in the community. There are enough bad things that happen to good people over which we have no control.



Lou Ann Evans

The fact that people deliberately set out to hurt good people I think is unfathomable."

She identified a board dynamic unique to this situation and one to which others referred.

"In the past, when new board members have come on, there's been a culture of the board into which they were absorbed. With the majority of the board being new members, we don't have that culture to fall back on. We need to develop a culture of working together, respect, trust."

**ANN MCGLAUGHLIN (SIX MONTHS)** echoed that but added:

"Any time you try to take two distinct groups of individuals and say, 'Here, work together,' it takes time; and with everything that preceded it, I didn't really expect it was going to be a walk in the park. It's had its ups and downs, but in time, it'll work its way out."

**LOU ANN EVANS (10 YEARS):** "It takes time, and it takes effort on everybody's part to make that (relationship) happen, and doing it in a public arena is extremely difficult. You build a history, and as you listen to one another explain why you're making the decision you're making, you get to know the person's philosophy, and you listen to the questions they're asking.

"That's so valuable—to listen to the kinds of questions that are being asked—so you have an understanding of what the other person knows or doesn't know, so you can share your knowledge or your experience or a different perspective."

**STAHL:** "I would say the biggest obstacle is my dissatisfaction with the media. We have, I think, been very cordial and been an



Rick Madore

effective board right now, and you wouldn't know that based on what you read. That's a greater obstacle than district issues.

"A well-informed public will participate in an effective manner, and an ill-informed public will only be in a defensive mode."

**MADORE** said replacing a board member put the biggest wrench in the works.

"When I look at how the board was starting to function and get along and accomplish the work that was in front of us, we were doing quite well. There was a little uneasiness, but that was normal, especially when they know they're coming from different viewpoints.

"But what that whole process did was put us back into election mode, and it's the thing we didn't need at that time."

**Goals**

*VOICES:* "What are your specific goals for the foreseeable future?"

All of the new board members and most of the veterans listed the districtwide master plan as the highest priority for the board, with a nod to passing the budget as well. The next most common comment was a desire to see the board working together better. Various members raised concerns about needed renovations at older elementary schools and the high school.

Pawelczyk added environmental sustainability and what he called a districtwide educational plan. Hutchinson and Evans listed the need to get secondary school students more connected to the schools. Both named civic engagement and service learning as part of that process.

Everyone mentioned the need for public



James Pawelczyk

input, listing a variety of ways to solicit such input:

- Expanding information on the Web site and the use of e-mail.
- Holding open and inclusive meetings, work sessions and citizens advisory

committee meetings.

- Using school functions to network with other parents.
- Presenting programs and issues to church and business gatherings, the parent-teacher association and other groups.
- Hosting school open houses for the public.
- Seeing what the companies vying for the districtwide master plan propose.

Fewer than half of all citizens vote, much less attend public meetings. And board meetings seem to have become a battleground for the handful of people in the room. So *Voices* asked, "What average member of the public would venture forth into such a seemingly hostile environment?"

**MADORE** chairs the meetings.

"There's a line that we as civil people shouldn't cross, and yet sometimes it does get crossed," he said. "Right now I want to give everybody the opportunity to say what they have to say. It falls under being as inclusive as you can be.

"I'm not going to be responsible for what they want to say, though I have to be responsible for board meetings being run effectively. It looks like I need to step in

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from one is difficult for poor women. In Pennsylvania, we have a 24-hour waiting period requirement, which means a meeting is mandatory before the abortion. This limits women's opportunities to get the basic health care that they deserve.

We have very draconian abortion laws in Pennsylvania, which penalize rural and poor women. We need improvement in that area in this community.

VOICES: What is NOW doing locally? ANDRONICI: On the state level, we are working to oppose the Marriage Protection Amendment (which would establish a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage) from coming to vote.

We have been down in Harrisburg organizing against it. We have been working in coalitions to defeat that, and it looks as though it's dead in the water for the time being.

Here in State College, during the last council session, we helped to design and lobby for the passage of a very broad antidiscrimination ordinance against prohibitions of employment and housing on the basis of one's caregiving role, whether it be as a parent or child of an elderly parent.

There is a similar bill in the assembly (SB912 and HB3000) we are working on. We are trying to create an antidiscrimination ordinance as expansive at the state level as we did in State College.

VOICES: Pennsylvania NOW President Joanne Tosti-Vasey recently defeated her male Democratic opponent in the primary

for state representative for the 171st District. How do you think she successfully engaged rural voters?

ANDRONICI: She is an impressive candidate. She knows what matters to people in the region. She promoted those issues effectively and personally, and that's what women do. We know how to work hard and engage people.

She set an agenda for health care for all families and focused on community issues. She knocked on doors in the rain and snow and promoted herself personally. You know, women are trained not to do that. Don't put yourself out there. Don't put yourself forward. Joanne has taken that and flipped it on its head.

Locally, we need more women in politics. We have 14 percent women in state legislature, which is not acceptable. We know that when women lead, they lead competently, effectively and on issues important to women. We wouldn't have groundbreaking successes in Congress without women. For example: Title IX and the FMLA.

We just passed one of the country's most expansive antidiscrimination ordinances here in State College. That would not have passed if it weren't for some of our women leaders in the area.

VOICES: The Centre County Women's Resource Center is an important resource for victims of domestic violence, but it suffers from a lack of funding.

What can the NOW national board of directors do to ensure that women's resource centers in Pennsylvania and elsewhere can continue to provide critically important services?

ANDRONICI: Let me say first I have the highest regard for the CCWRC. They do some of the most important work in the region. These services are absolutely critical for all women everywhere. We need to bring family violence to the table as often as possible.

Different members of the NOW board have different values, but community resource centers are at the forefront of my work.

Funding is a terrible crisis we are facing, given the fact that the national budget has been broken by the war and is truly bankrupting basic services.

We are losing ground badly. I believe in lobbying, and I've done it myself many times. I believe if you show up with your feet on the ground and say, "I am a constituent, and this is what I need," there are times when that voice is heard.

The more who show up and say that, the better. I am a believer in collective action. Community organizing is critical.

VOICES: Last year's Deficit Reduction Act terminated discounts on birth control for college health clinics and safety-net providers. Planned Parenthood called it a bureaucratic mistake, but NOW called it a "sneak attack on birth control." Was the loss of discounts on birth control accidental or politically motivated?

ANDRONICI: This was absolutely an anti-choice agenda item. Young women on contraceptives are suddenly forced to use their food money to get contraception or seek other funds for it. I just spoke with a clinic last week, and the woman said that she has girls that have ceased coming because the

cost is prohibitive. Conservatives thought they could get away with this, but luckily the women's movement caught on quickly and made a big issue of it. I think the Senate passed something last week which will reverse the ruling. But it wasn't a mistake. Anything that takes one of the few rights away that women have in this country is a not an oversight.

VOICES: The 2004 March for Women's Lives was the largest demonstration in U.S. history. Despite the obvious successes of the event, some criticized that day and the larger organization of NOW for focusing primarily on issues of importance to educated, middle-class, white women. Are those fair criticisms of NOW?

ANDRONICI: These issues that supposedly only matter to educated, white women aren't important just to them; they are of concern to all women, and of greater concern to poor women. For example, pay equity and child care options are far more important to poor women.

The values of equal representation and ability to earn an equal, fair wage and reproductive control are important to all women.

I have seen increasing diversification of membership in NOW. Women of color have been there from the start, but it is wonderful to see younger women of color coming in. We are doing a good job of speaking the language of the new women's movement. We worry about all issues related to class, economics and gender.

Feminism is about all of those things, and I am proud to be part of an organization that understands that.

from Homelessness, pg. 4

to more families. "I certainly think that any law that would expand the definition of homelessness to include more of the people who are affected by it is a great step toward solving the problem," Marshall said. "I can only hope that a change in perspective of this kind would provide the shelter with greater resources to serve the community."

Centre County has three emergency shelters that offer temporary housing to the homeless: Centre House, which provides shelter and food to homeless families and individuals over the age of 18; Burrowes Youth Haven, which houses individuals between 12 and 18 years of age for a maximum of 15 days; and the Sylvania Stein Shelter, for victims of domestic violence or sexual assault.

Mental illness and drug abuse, as well as the lack of affordable housing and the economic downturn, contribute to homelessness in Centre County. According to Housing Transitions records, 59 of the 128 people served by Centre House in 2006 were mentally ill or retarded, or drug or alcohol users.

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According to Hicks, transportation can also be an issue, especially for people trying to transition from homelessness to a permanent residence. Having a car makes travel easier between

rural areas, where housing costs less, and urban areas, which offer more chances for employment.

Single people may be more likely to end up homeless because affording rent on a single income, especially for those who make minimum wage, is extremely difficult, Walters said, noting that homelessness has a significant impact on families, too.

"Usually people do anything they can to keep kids out of the homeless shelter," Hicks said. "But—perhaps because of the

current economy—more children have been at the shelter this year."

Twenty of the 128 people served by Centre House in 2006 were children.

In addition to providing shelter, Housing Transitions helps people to obtain permanent housing. The organization's Transitional Housing program has eight transitional units that act as extensions of the shelter system.

Individuals in those units pay 25 to 30 percent of their incomes in rent, meet regularly with a case manager and work on specific self-sufficiency goals. Depending on the program, individuals are allowed to stay in the units for up to two years.

As with many social service programs, the organizations that aid the homeless in Centre County struggle to bring in sufficient funding.

"We have to serve more and more people with less and less money," Walters said.

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and ask people to keep their comments relevant, concise and appropriate.”

### Finally, will there be a new school or not?

In their own words:

STAHL: “The growth we’re going to have is going to feed into Park Forest and Radio Park, which already had two trailers trying to accommodate the overflow. So if the growth continues, there will have to be a new school or they will have to be renovated, unless we are going to just keep changing boundary lines. So yes, I would say our district would have to accommodate a new elementary school.”

MCGLAUGHLIN: “You have to go back and look at the education part of it. We don’t have increasing enrollment; it looks like it’ll stay the same for about 15 years. I know people want to tie us down to a yes or no about that, but I don’t have a set idea.”

SMALL: “People need to put their emotions aside. Any business not willing to look at all the options is not doing its job. It’s very possible that when you look at the



David Hutchinson

facts, it’s just not fiscally responsible to do that at this time, but you definitely have to have that conversation.

“There’s a lot of suspicion out there in the community. You don’t have to read or listen too much to think the new board members

have an agenda. That’s not true.

“But the thing that’s of most interest of this community is the high school. I think it’s unfortunate that when people like Jim Pawelczyk say, ‘Let’s look at green,’ there are people who say, ‘That’s an end run around to “let’s build a new high school.”’”

MADORE: “Whether it’s a new school or a renovation, it will have to come with extra costs we have to absorb, but I look at those kinds of capital projects as something different than our annual budget. I would like to be able to design any future school with the idea that that school will be with us for a long time and spread the cost of that over time.”

PAWELCZYK: “What we know from our demographic analysis, the growth pressure is on the west side of town, predominantly Ferguson and Patton and likely to include Half Moon. It might not be 10 years but maybe farther down from that.

“A large high school at a new site? I think that’s on the table. But what else is there? Matching it with the resources. Is there an optimal site within the growth boundaries of the district? That’s part of the dialogue.”

HUTCHINSON: “The demographics suggest that we do not foresee the need for a new elementary school because our enrollment’s fairly flat. The only issue would be if you decide to replace one.”

QUEENEY: “The groundwork has been laid to fund a new school if and when the board decides to build one. That’s a very complicated question.

“For a new school, we borrow money, and we do have some funds that have been set aside for this kind of thing, but yes, there are possibilities for funding another school.”

ROPER: “I don’t think so. I think we have to go through the districtwide master plan. They’ll make that recommendation, but I think the demographic study suggested that,

in fact, we have the capacity that we need, because the population is not changing. We have the classroom space.

“That gets back to the sustainability and sprawl issue. We’ve got the buildings; we may need to renovate them and may do that in a sustainable way, but at this point, I wouldn’t say we need a new school.”

EVANS: “The demographic study supports the fact that we are not going to see a large growth in student population.

“Of course there will be some changes in location. I believe the high school needs to stay in the borough. The study shows most of the student growth is going to be around Radio Park and Easterly Parkway, with slow growth in Patton Township. So I think the location we currently have is the appropriate spot.

“I also very strongly believe that having a comprehensive high school is the best possible high school education we can offer the students in this community, and anything else is a disservice to the kids. When you look at recommendations for high school reform, it’s all about multiple educational opportunities for kids, a blending of career, technical and academics. And it’s exactly what we have.”

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