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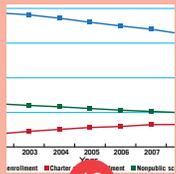
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Philadelphia Public School

the notebook

An Independent Voice for Parents, Educators, Students, and Friends of Philadelphia Public Schools

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Harvey Finkle

William Penn High School is one school whose future is at stake in the District's facilities master planning process. The building, in need of millions of dollars in repairs, has been closed since 2010, but no final decision on its status has been made. Shown here is the cluttered lobby at the North Broad Street entrance.

Finally, it's closing time

With enrollments still falling and no money to spare, the District looks ready to make hard decisions.
by Dale Mezzacappa

There is no easy way to close schools. Embedded in neighborhood history, these buildings hold memories for thousands. They are the source of pride, loyalty and identity – no matter how deteriorated the building, how inadequate the academics, and how empty the hallways.

For decades, Philadelphia school officials have repeatedly put off any hard look at what to do in the face of departing students, aging buildings, and stretched resources.

Enrollment in District schools is now barely 160,000 students, just more than half of what it was at its peak in 1970 of nearly 300,000. There was a brief uptick in the early 1990s, but the decline has been steady over the past 15 years, especially with the rise of charter schools, which now educate more than 40,000 students.

Although various administrations did studies of school facilities, they never resulted in many closings – even though the District couldn't afford to maintain all its buildings.

As a result, it finds itself today with an estimated 70,000 empty seats in more than 280 structures, at the

same time it is facing a major funding shortfall.

Now, the administration of Superintendent Arlene Ackerman is compiling a comprehensive facilities master plan designed to “right-size” its physical plant, and the School Reform Commission is promising action.

“This SRC is not going to kick the can down the street and leave the tough issues to somebody else,” said Commissioner David Girard-diCarlo.

The goal, officials say, is to maximize educational availability, quality, and equity around the city for a dwindling student population that is also growing increasingly disadvantaged. Actions going forward, they say, will include downsizing, dealing with

surplus property, and thinking about capital needs, all in the context of improving academic programs.

While public input is invited through three rounds of meetings, key aspects of the decision-making process have so far been kept under wraps.

Officials have shared 11 factors they are using to evaluate

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**The Ackerman
administration is
compiling a facilities
master plan designed
to “right-size” its
physical plant.**

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Philadelphia Public School

thenotebook



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Contributing editor: Dale Mezzacappa

Web editor: Erika Owens

Operations/business manager: Corey Mark

Design: Joseph Kemp

Photography: Harvey Finkle

Copy editor: Juli Warren

Cartoonist: Eric Joselyn

Spanish translation: Mildred S. Martínez

Editorial assistance: Joseph Blanc, Len Rieser, Sandy Socolar

Contributing writers: JoAnn Greco, Benjamin Herold, Alan Jaffe

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our opinion

Level with us!

School District administrators and the School Reform Commission have wisely recognized a problem they can't afford to put off dealing with any longer – too many buildings.

Since the late 1990s, 70 new charter schools have been added to the landscape, as well as a number of new, small high schools. Only a handful of District schools have been closed. With the school-age population declining, many of the system's aging buildings have been largely depopulated. Overall, one-third of the city's classroom space is unused, according to the latest study.

Though there may be some quibbles with the new estimate of 70,000 empty seats, the conclusion that the District must move to get rid of its excess capacity is indisputable. There could be major savings if the District was not dealing with the fixed costs of operating so many buildings. The District is overwhelmed by this vast and deteriorating infrastructure and needs to right-size in order to have any chance of making its buildings suitable environments for learning.

The District's facilities planning process – informing the public that downsizing is inevitable – absolutely needs to happen. The undertaking is massive and politically challenging, but cannot be put off. Conducting a comprehensive and citywide process also makes sense. When the District has tried to close a single school here

or there, those communities feel arbitrarily targeted. This problem involves the whole city, and the District has recognized that extensive community involvement is needed.

But how they have conducted that engagement process is alarming. A change in course is needed. Despite the promise of transparency, the District has given only vague answers to the most basic questions: What data about schools should we be looking at? How will the District weigh different factors? When

Don't keep the public in the dark about proposed school closings and consolidations.

will the public hear specific proposals for closings and consolidations? What opportunities will there be to respond to those proposals? By when must decisions be made? Are there any targets for seat reductions or cost savings? What happens to buildings that are closed?

When the *Notebook* tried getting updated capacity numbers for specific schools and costs for renovating them, it was as if we had asked for state secrets. At press time, the District still had not said exactly when it will release those numbers. As to whether schools are going to have to be closed, the District's guarded response has been "Possibly."

It's time to level with the public. Put all the information out there. Get some preliminary proposals on the table. Don't keep the public guessing.

No community is going to be happy to see its school closed, and there's already a lot of mistrust. But the only way to turn that around is with openness.

Shades of 2002

At South Philadelphia High School, staff members were in tears when they heard the news on January 25 that the school was being named a Promise Academy – albeit the "Innovation" version, where much of the staff could remain. The announcement portends more upheaval for a school that had started to stabilize under new leadership after the violence and chaos of a year ago. Suddenly, teachers who have spent the year working toward creating a more supportive school culture have been thrust back into uncertainty, forced to reapply for their positions.

Was this shakeup supported by the staff, students, and community members who have been working hard to make a dramatic turnaround happen at Southern? Actually, nobody consulted them. The decision to overhaul it in a round of 18 more Renaissance Schools was decreed from downtown.

With this year's Renaissance Schools and Promise Academies, the District did a disturbing about-face on one of the core principles of its ambitious school turnaround effort.

When the District rolled out its Renaissance initiative last year, it touted community input on turnaround plans as a distinguishing feature. Officials ac-

knowledged a key lesson of the 2002 state takeover: Forcing a reform approach down the throat of a community is ultimately not helpful in building the will and momentum needed to make dramatic school change.

Consulting with the community is not simply good democratic practice. Engaging the public opens up opportunities to tap skills and energy that struggling schools really need.

Yet at only six of the 18 new Renaissance Schools will school councils have a voice about what model or provider comes in next fall. At the other 12 schools, those key questions have already been decided. Two of those were offered to Universal Companies as charters without any school-based process. The rules for selecting schools and assigning them to providers seem to change arbitrarily, without any explanation.

The School District deserves credit for taking on the challenge of transforming long-neglected schools like Olney and Germantown High. But it's critical that they use the right strategies and a transparent process. To make any headway, the District must embrace a basic principle: Doing school reform to a community rather than *with* a community simply won't work.

letterstotheeditors

Break down barriers to learning

To the editors:

Like many schools around the country, many Philadelphia schools are in need of a Messiah-like resurrection. While recent data may suggest that our children are making gains, failure is still the norm in many of Philly's public schools.

The logical question would be why?

Sure, unruly students can make teaching and learning difficult. Sure, many of our schools crave renovations and greater resources, and many Home and School Associations need resuscitation.

But that being said, the words of President Barack Obama come to mind: "From the moment our children step into a classroom, the single most important factor in determining their achievement is not the color of their skin or where they come from; it's not who their parents are or how much money they have. It's who their teacher is. It's you."

Educators can make the difference between success and failure, evoke hope in times of despair, trample hate with love, and break down barriers to learning.

Daninia A. Jordan

The writer is a Philadelphia public school teacher.

Don't damage their growth

To the editors:

I found the December issue of the *Notebook* ("Teachers and reform") to be depressing but truthful. Teachers and students alike are being treated like "things" to be measured, rather than diverse human beings.

It would have been good to mention a study by Settlement Music School that revealed preschool children who were exposed to art and music were more advanced.

They are also capable of learning different languages. The best time to expose children to different subjects is when they are young.

Isn't it a wonder that children leave school yet still find their way to what interests them, with no help from the school curriculum that oftentimes dumbs down their individual talents?

As for teachers who want to teach, environments that limit creativity and push testing curricula can be damaging to their growth as well as the students.

Joan Sage

The writer directs *The Whimsical Sage ReadAloud* program in Philadelphia schools.

Bless the work of teachers

To the editors:

I believe in teachers' unions. I pray and hope that Philadelphia students, parents, and others who are in the lives of our children and youth appreciate teachers and support them in every way possible.

Educators have chosen a career that blesses others. Sometimes teachers are put in positions where they are dared to do a good job, but that is not the way teachers should be treated.

Helpfulness, understanding, consideration, and respect are due our teachers – even the ones who are struggling. We do not know the obstacles that other people are facing – balancing home and children, and perhaps sickness within their circle of loved ones. We should be slow to judge and unfeeling in our support of someone who may be facing difficult times at work.

God bless the work of the teachers and the efforts of those who support the public education of all preschoolers, children, youth, and adult students.

Harriet "Buzz" Valentia

The writer lives in Seattle, Washington.

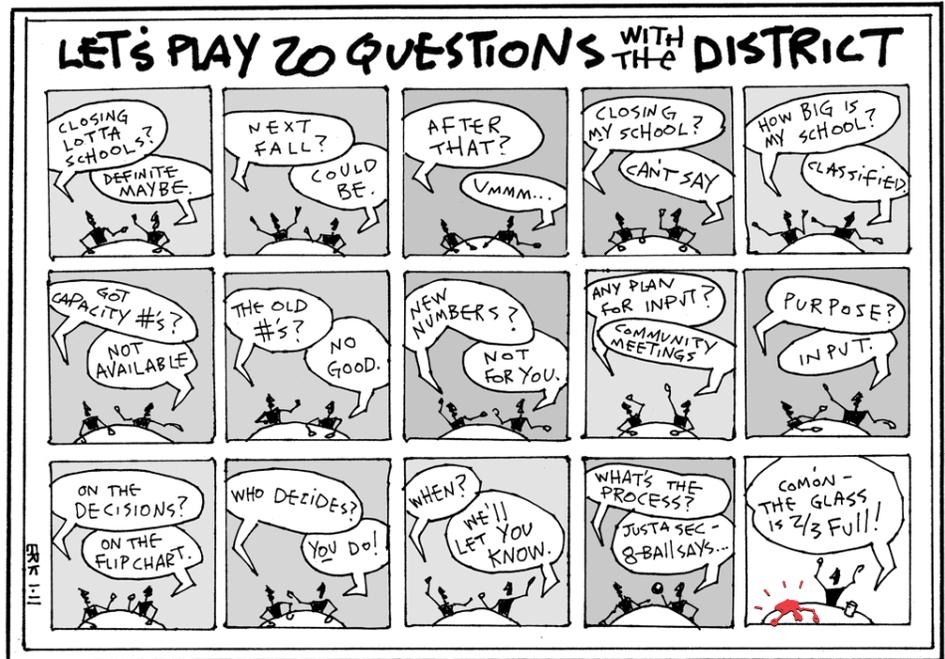
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eyon special education



District's facilities planning process raises concerns on survival of special ed programs

by *Notebook* staff

In a January presentation to the School Reform Commission, District officials introduced their plans to "right-size" the many half-empty, aging facilities but offered no specifics on how closures and consolidations could impact special education services, especially those for severely disabled students.

The District did say it will "implement a phase-in model of inclusion whenever possible" while providing for co-teaching with special and regular education teachers. District spokesperson Elizabeth Childs said that as part of the downsizing process, "We are looking at how the District's special education programming looks now, including programs like Life Skills Support (LSS)." She added that at community meetings around potential closures, 55 percent of participants cited LSS classes as a "must have" for their local school.

Yet it is unclear what happens to LSS classes or such programs as Strategies for Teaching Based on Autism Research (STAR) if schools housing these critical programs close or consolidate.

Life skills and autism support are two of many programs managed by the District's Office of Specialized Instruction.

The LSS classes teach the severely disabled everyday tasks like taking a carton of milk out of the refrigerator or tying a pair of shoes. They are staffed by teachers, nurses, and teacher's aides.

The STAR program teaches children expressive and receptive language, pre-academic skills, play, and social skills to improve general functioning.

Hunter Elementary in Kensington has three teachers and 17 students in its LSS classrooms. Hunter's is one of the many programs serving 1,200 severely disabled children districtwide.

Lajuan (not his real name) is one of three students in Joanmarie Cruz's LSS class at Hunter. He is blind and deaf

but is not in a world of his own. He engages with the class.

Cruz helps Lajuan and others connect through one-on-one interaction. She often rubs students' hands with lotion to provide tactile stimulation, soothe anxiety, and get their attention. "I do a lot of sensory stimulation ... touch, smell, and sight," she said.

Disability rights groups, parents, and other advocates applaud the personal touch and hope the consolidation of facilities will not make these programs less accessible.

"Hopefully the District would be mindful of the 'least restrictive environment' requirement of the federal special education law," said Jennifer Lowman, a staff attorney at the Education Law Center. The law protects against isolating special education students in a building.

The District's relationships with special needs children and their families may be strained by upcoming changes.

"I am deeply concerned when the discussion of school closures comes up because the Nebinger School is repeatedly on the chopping block," said Nebinger parent Cathy Rocca-Meier, who has a son with autism in the 8th grade. She sits on the board of the ARC of Philadelphia and is a member of the Local Right to Education Task Force.

Nebinger serves Bella Vista and Queen Village, where high property values and low enrollment could make the school a target for closure, she said.

The irony, Rocca-Meier said, is that a low pupil-to-teacher ratio – eight to ten students per class – allows teachers to give personalized instruction to students with autism spectrum disorder and Asperger syndrome.

"Nebinger's small size allows for each student to be an individual, known by a staff that is more like family ... The idea that they can take students who crave routine and structure and uproot them and expect it to not hinder their education is ludicrous."

aboutthenotebook

The *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* is an independent news service whose mission is to promote informed public involvement in the Philadelphia public schools and to contribute to the development of a strong, collaborative movement for positive educational change in city schools and for schools that serve all children well. The *Notebook* has published a newspaper since 1994. *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* is a project of the New Beginning Nonprofit Incubator of Resources for Human Development. Send inquiries to:

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With Corbett in office, voucher debate is back

by Celeste Lavin and Raquel Ronzone

Recently inaugurated Republican Gov. Tom Corbett kicked off his term by declaring his second week in office “Pennsylvania School Choice Week,” signaling that his educational priorities will diverge markedly from those of former Gov. Rendell.

School vouchers never went far during Democrat Rendell’s eight-year tenure, after getting a vigorous airing in the previous two terms of Republican Tom Ridge, who failed to get a bill passed in three tries.

But with state control seesawing back to a Republican administration, the voucher debate is again front and center.

Legislation to make vouchers available to low-income students, Senate Bill 1, is co-sponsored by Senate Education Committee chairman Jeffrey Piccola and Philadelphia Democratic Sen. Anthony Hardy Williams. It is being fast-tracked in the legislature.

The governor’s pronouncements about education in his first weeks in office have focused on “choice,” while he has been silent on policies important to Rendell, including expanding pre-kindergarten, increasing the state share of education expenditures, and making spending among districts more equitable.

With Harrisburg facing a deficit topping \$4 billion and Corbett vowing no tax increases, even Rendell said it was unrealistic to think that state education spending would continue to rise.

Before leaving office, however, he

urged Corbett to “hold education harmless,” but got no commitment.

Corbett has also been silent about Rendell’s contention that increased spending during his term paid off in consistently rising test scores.

Instead, he has turned the focus back to charter schools and vouchers.

“If a school is not providing an adequate education, the money should follow the students,” Corbett spokesman Kevin Harley told *The Inquirer*. Corbett “believes it should be the students first, parents second, and teachers third. Today, the educational establishment has put teachers first and students third.”

Vouchers allow students to use state funds to attend private schools, including religious schools, or public schools outside their district. Under this proposed bill, the per-student subsidy that the state normally gives to the student’s district could instead be used towards tuition.

Who’s choosing whom?

Rendell argued that vouchers would not necessarily guarantee a student a private school education because they can turn away applicants.

Corbett, however, believes vouchers represent the next step in education reform. “Our educational system must contend with other nations and so we must embrace innovation, competition and choice,” he said in his inaugural address.

In a statement declaring school choice week in the state (to coincide with National School Choice Week), Corbett said that “choice isn’t about choosing one model over another, it’s about giving families the freedom to choose the school – public, private, charter, religious, secular – that will help their children learn and grow.”

As in the past, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association and the state’s teacher unions are opposed.

“Creating a separate education system does nothing to address inadequacies or issues with the existing public school system,” said a PSBA statement. “Rather than remove a select few, disadvantaged students from a school that may be underperforming, why not assist public schools to correct or increase their capacity to correct problems so that all students are able to thrive?”

Vouchers and achievement

National experts say that there is no evidence that vouchers are an effective strategy for improving the educational outcomes for low-income children.

Jack Jennings, the president of the nonpartisan Center on Education Policy, said that while a few studies funded by



Governor Tom Corbett

voucher proponents have found some sporadic test score increases for students attending voucher schools, “there is no solid evidence that there is consistent improvement.”

A recent review of the literature by Philadelphia-based Research for Action drew a similar conclusion: “Reputable research on voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Wash-

ington, D.C. indicates that they produce few if any statistically significant effects on student achievement.”

Voucher proponents “have expected that with competition, with choice, you’re going to get ... results favorable to vouchers, and that hasn’t happened,” said Henry Levin, director of the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Studies have shown vouchers do provide families with more choices, he said, but “if you say it will improve equity, improve achievement, reduce costs, we don’t have strong evidence.”

Senate Bill 1 would phase in a voucher program for children in low-income families over three years. It would also in-

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Corbett

(continued from page 4)

create the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program, which provides tax breaks to corporations that donate to a private scholarship fund, from \$50 million to \$75 million.

Williams, who proposed a similar bill last year, told a voucher rally in the Capitol Rotunda on January 25 that “today is the beginning of the next civil rights movement of this nation.” Many participants carried signs with the 1963 image of Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace preventing Black students from entering the

University of Alabama, and the slogan, “Someone new is blocking the school house door.”

Ronald Tomalis, Corbett’s new secretary of education worked in the Ridge administration under Education Secretary Eugene Hickok, who led the failed voucher efforts in the 1990s. He also worked in the U.S. Department of Education during the George W. Bush administration.

Despite solid gubernatorial support, the voucher legislation is not a political slam dunk. In the 1990s, many rural legislators didn’t see the benefit of vouchers to their constituents and felt the proposals would benefit mostly low-income residents

of Philadelphia and Catholic schools.

A statewide public opinion poll conducted by Terry Madonna Opinion Research found that two-thirds of adult Pennsylvanians oppose taxpayer-funded voucher programs. PSBA released a statement highlighting the survey results, saying that while some studies have shown public support for a voucher system, support drops greatly when the term “taxpayer-funded” was included.

The survey found that opposition to vouchers does not fall on racial or geographic lines. It also found that while more Democrats oppose vouchers than do Republicans, majorities in both parties oppose them.

Any legislation is also likely to come under immediate court challenge.

The Pennsylvania constitution, like 38 other state constitutions, has an amendment that prohibits the use of state funds for religiously affiliated education. But while a statewide voucher program in Florida has repeatedly been ruled unconstitutional, programs in Cleveland and Milwaukee and Washington, D.C. have not been. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that voucher programs do not violate the federal constitution.

Celeste Lavin and Raquel Ronzone are interns at the Notebook.

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Year two Renaissance plans: Bigger and pricier

This cohort of 18 schools sees a new process, a new partnership, and two new turnaround models.
by Benjamin Herold

In a plan that will expand Superintendent Arlene Ackerman's Renaissance Schools initiative to encompass 31 schools and 12 percent of the District's students, 18 more low-performing schools have been targeted for radical overhauls.

"Everyone knows this comes back to me," said Ackerman in announcing the move. "These schools are under my very close watch and care."

The second year of the Renaissance initiative features two new turnaround models, a new process for selecting and assigning schools, and an unprecedented new partnership with South Philadelphia-based community development organization Universal Companies.

This year's Renaissance plan calls for expanding both of the original turnaround models. Six schools will join the seven existing Renaissance charters under the "Renaissance Match" model, and seven schools will join the six existing District-

run "Traditional" Promise Academies.

A gentler approach to turnaround will be tried at three schools that will become "Innovation" Promise Academies. Finally, two schools are slated to become charters as "Promise Neighborhood Partnership Schools" (see box, p. 7).

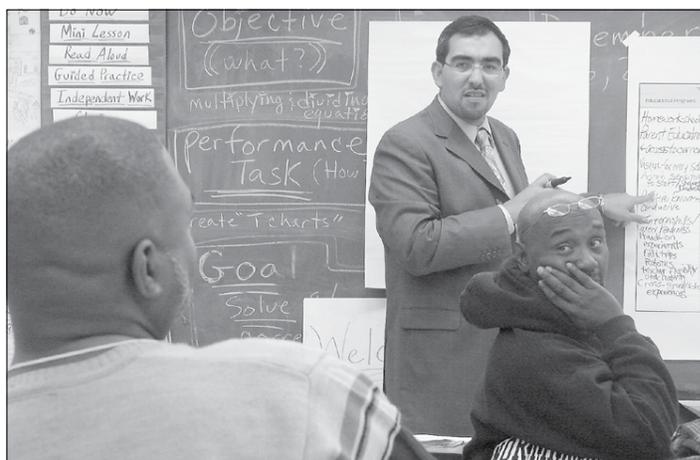
If the year two expansion proceeds as planned, roughly 10,000 students would attend Renaissance charters, and almost 9,000 would attend Promise Academies.

The District also changed the criteria it used to select Renaissance schools.

Last year's initial group of 14 "Renaissance-eligible schools" was selected strictly on the basis of their School Performance Index (SPI) ratings. This year, officials say they considered a range of additional factors, including schools' dropout rates, school climate data, teacher attrition, and feeder patterns.

The targeted schools will extend the initiative into new areas of South, North, and Northwest Philadelphia.

Ten of the 18 new Renaissance schools are neighborhood high schools. Five of those – Audenried, Gratz, King, Olney East, and Olney West – are slated



Benjamin Herold

Assistant Superintendent Francisco Duran will oversee the expansion of Promise Academies in year two of the District's Renaissance initiative.

to become charters.

Three more will join University City and Vaux as Traditional Promise Academies.

And South Philadelphia, which was rocked by racial violence last year, but has seen recent improvements, is one of two neighborhood high schools that will become Innovation Promise Academies.

"I don't think it's a wise decision," said Duong Ly, a student activist and senior at South Philadelphia.

"We are making progress, [but] they decided to mess around with the dynamics of the school [without] talking to us beforehand."

In a departure from the process used during the first year of the Renaissance initiative, schools were not given an option as to whether to seek Promise Academy status.

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Penny Nixon said the District used demographic and performance data to identify the schools that were most similar to existing Promise Academies and most likely to benefit from that turnaround model.

"It's so frustrating. We were supposed to

be involved in the process, but there's been no communication," said Shirley Randleman, president of the 52nd Street Business Association and chair of the School Advisory Council (SAC) at West Philadelphia High School, which the District designated as a Traditional Promise Academy.

The West SAC voted against becoming a Promise Academy last year.

Despite changes in the process for assigning schools to turnaround models, Ackerman said "Parent, community, and staff input will continue to be what distinguishes this initiative from others."

Like last year, SACs at the six schools slated for the Renaissance Match process will have the opportunity to evaluate potential turnaround teams and recommend a preferred provider between February and March.

Among the seven organizations approved by the District to manage schools are three existing Renaissance providers: ASPIRA, Inc., Mastery Charter Schools, and Universal Companies, and some new faces (see box, p. 7).

SAC recommendations will be due to Superintendent Ackerman in mid-March. As with last year, Ackerman will be the one to finalize recommendations on provider-school matches, which will ultimately be voted on by the School Reform

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Renaissance

(continued from page 6)

Commission later in the spring.

But the District will bypass this public matching process at the other two Renaissance schools slated to become charters. As part of their Promise Neighborhood Partnership, the District has selected Universal Companies to manage Audenried High School and Edwin Vare Middle School, a move that will require SRC approval.

The partnership is the result of a federal planning grant Universal has received to begin turning the Point Breeze and Grays Ferry neighborhoods of South Philadelphia into a "Promise Neighborhood" with a comprehensive set of family services, modeled on the Harlem Children's Zone.

"We're happy with our partnership with Universal, [and] we believe they're worthy of our trust with two more schools," Ackerman said.

Associate Superintendent Diane Castellbuono added that Universal has already led

an "enormous public process" in applying for the Promise Neighborhood planning grant.

But Universal President/CEO Rahim Islam said that process has not yet included public discussion of Vare and Audenried becoming charters.

"We've already met with most of the [community] leaders, [but] not on the issue of Vare and Audenried being charters – really, that was just incidental," said Islam. "Our next step is to actively engage the community in this process."

The District will also coordinate with Universal to provide services to Alcorn and Smith Elementary Schools, both of which are part of Audenried's feeder pattern and both of which will become Traditional Promise Academies.

The District does not yet have a cost estimate for the second year of the initiative, said spokesperson Elizabeth Childs.

The overall price tag for the first year of the Renaissance initiative was \$20 million.

About half of that went to operate the current Promise Academies, where \$9.6

million – about \$3,600 in additional per pupil funding – paid for extra supports in those six schools. Most of the expense was due to increased staff compensation for the longer school day and year.

Despite widespread concerns about an enormous budget shortfall, District officials said the Renaissance initiative would move forward.

"We have an absolute moral obligation to turn around these schools," said Associate Superintendent David Weiner.

"Any potential budget issues are not going to stop this [Renaissance] process."

The District will be hosting community meetings about year two of the Renaissance Schools initiative. For more details and to see a complete timeline, visit: www.philasd.org/renaissance.

Freelance writer Benjamin Herold covers Renaissance Schools for the Notebook. For complete coverage, go to www.thenotebook.org/renewschools.

Round 2 breakdown

Traditional Promise Academies

Up to 50 percent of staff may be rehired as District employees. Principals at the school two years or less can remain. Longer school day and year, new support staff, and new enrichment opportunities for students. Empowerment School curriculum is used.

- Alcorn (K-8)
- Barry (K-8)
- FitzSimons H.S. (7-12)
- Germantown H.S. (9-12)
- Pennell (K-6)
- Smith (K-8)
- West Philadelphia H.S. (9-12)

Innovation Promise Academies

Similar to Traditional Promise Academies, but principal remains and teachers must reapply but with no limit on the percentage that can be rehired.

- Kelley, W.D. (K-8)
- Sayre H.S. (9-12)
- South Philadelphia H.S. (9-12)

Promise Neighborhood Partnership Schools

Charter schools operated by Universal Companies, who will handle staffing. Longer school day.

- Audenried H.S. (9-11)
- Vare, Edwin M.S. (5-8)

Renaissance Charter (Match) Schools

SACs evaluate external providers and make recommendation. External provider responsible for staffing, curriculum, and length of school day and year.

- Birney (K-8)
- Clymer (K-8)
- Gratz H.S. (9-12)
- King H.S. (9-12)
- Olney East H.S. (9-12)
- Olney West H.S. (9-12)

Year Two Renaissance Providers

- ASPIRA, Inc. of Pennsylvania
- Mastery Charter Schools
- Universal Companies, Inc.
- Nueva Esperanza, Inc.
- Foundations, Inc.
- Johns Hopkins U./TD Diplomas Now
- Mosaica Turnaround Teams



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2527 N. Broad Street
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Outside play area/parking area

1826 W. Lehigh Avenue
180,000 Sq. Ft. • Signature Bldg. Status
Outside play/parking areas

Hunting Park/East Falls
2409 Westmoreland St.
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Facing a daunting budget gap, District is in austerity mode

Four years ago, the School District was entering its budget season facing an unprecedented \$180 million budget gap. For months it focused on finding the right combination of cuts and new revenues to balance the budget.

As it prepares its 2011-12 budget, the District is staring at a daunting gap easily twice as large as 2007's – and both its main funders, local and state government, face financial problems of their own. In January, the District moved into austerity mode, restricting “non-urgent spending” for personnel, contracts, equipment, and supplies.

At the same time, District officials consistently declined to put a dollar figure on the impending hole they will face next year, other than to acknowledge that a quarter billion dollars in federal stimulus funding for Philadelphia is coming to an end. They emphasize that they expect to end this school year in the black.

On top of losing the stimulus, the District faces substantial cost increases

next year for salaries, pensions, utilities, debt service, and charter schools. Some sources have put the total gap at over \$400 million. The District could cut all the extra money in this year's budget for its *Imagine 2014* strategic plan initiatives – which Superintendent Arlene Ackerman said she won't do – and still only close half of the gap.

Former interim District CEO Philip Goldsmith, a *Daily News* columnist, said he doesn't understand the District's reluctance to state the size of the problem. “It's important that the public be informed of the fiscal realities of the District so it can be prepared for the consequences and help shape the discussion,” he told the *Notebook*. “Not talking about it openly does not make the problem go away.”

Goldsmith has argued that the Dis-



Phil Goldsmith

trict's budget shortfall is largely “self-inflicted.”

“It has known for a very long time that this day of reckoning was likely to happen,” he said. “It should have made reductions a while ago. The longer it waited, the larger the cuts would have to be in the future.”

-Paul Socolar

New 3-year plan includes steps to address racial conflict

The School District has developed and started implementing a 16-page plan to address racial conflict, responding to a recent taskforce report.

The Taskforce on Racial and Cultural Harmony, a 50-member group formed by Superintendent Arlene Ackerman following the violence at South Philadelphia High School, examined the issue districtwide, produced a report last fall, and charged the District with implementing a plan for addressing issues of race and culture within 90 days.

The District's new plan describes numerous policies, programs, committees, curricula, and trainings it will phase in over a three-year period, with an emphasis on the following 10 “major initiatives” to promote racial and cultural harmony:

- Harassment and bullying policies;
- Anti-bullying programs;
- Character education;
- The Blue Ribbon Commission on school safety;
- School climate scorecards for each school;

- Integration of multiculturalism across the curriculum;
- Evaluation of staff “cultural competencies;”
- Diversity training for staff;
- Parent and Family Resource Centers;
- Parent University.

Jennie Wu, deputy for strategic planning and implementation, said the District will monitor and document progress on the annual goals in each area through the use of “department dashboards,” an internal management tool used to assess whether goals are being met.

Wu explained that each item in the plan is assigned to a department and “would be an item on their dashboard that we'll assess on a monthly or quarterly basis to see whether or not they accomplished what they said they were going to accomplish.”

A cross-sectional steering committee, including District administrators, teachers, principals, and taskforce co-chairs, put the plan together. Taskforce documents are on the District website, www.philasd.org, and Wu said the public will receive updates annually.

-Wendy Harris

Merger of two local groups aims to boost college success

Philadelphia Futures and the White-Williams Scholars, two organizations that have long helped low-income students complete high school and go to college, are merging in March as a way to expand and deepen their services.

The combined organization, which has yet to be named, will be in a better position to help students succeed in college once they get there, said Joan Mazzotti, president of Philadelphia Futures. She will also lead the new group.

“We recognize that financial support alone doesn't guarantee college success,” Mazzotti said.

“We also recognize that in the current economy, a larger organization with greater reach and scale will be more compelling to a broader range of funders.”

The combined budget of the two groups is \$3.4 million.

This school year, both will serve their current students with the same programming. Once the merger is complete, a strategic planning process will take place to “shape the long-term future of the combined organization,” Mazzotti said.

White-Williams, whose history goes back to the 19th century, has provided low-income high school students monthly stipends and academic advice. It started as an organization to help at-risk females and pioneered the concept of in-school counseling. Philadelphia Futures, which began in 1989, identifies low-income students with high potential and average or better grades, and provides them with mentors, scholarships, assistance getting into college, and supports during their college careers.

Futures also works with a group of colleges as destinations for their students, including Penn State, Dickinson, and Franklin & Marshall, and hopes to expand the partnerships to work with more institutions, Mazzotti said.

-Dale Mezzacappa

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Additional Local Community Alliances to Support Student Success

YUC report on zero tolerance says policy has failed

The local student group Youth United for Change is pushing for revisions in the District's zero-tolerance discipline policy. The group released a report in January, highlighting research that the policy has not made schools safer, is expensive, and involves the police in incidents that are not crimes.

"Students should be prepared for college; instead we are prepared for prison," said student and YUC member Brittany White in releasing the report, which was done with the Advancement Project, a national civil rights organization, and the Education Law Center.

The report said that students are often just "one minor mistake away" from being put on a path to prison instead of college.

The group is seeking public hearings and is hoping to get Gov. Tom Corbett interested in signing off on one of the report's major recommendations – a "memorandum of understanding" clarifying the relationship with city police in dealing with school-based infractions that don't rise to the level of felonies posing serious threats to staff or other students.

At a January 13 press conference to release the report, Councilwoman Maria Quiñones-Sánchez called its recommendations "clear, thoughtful, and doable," and said she would hold public hearings "to make sure this becomes

part of the public discussion."

State Rep. Tony Payton, calling the findings "striking," said the District should work to change the policy. Payton will also seek to hold hearings. He praised the use of "restorative justice," an approach to discipline that emphasizes repairing the harm done by the bad behavior and building relationships rather than simply punishing the perpetrator.

YUC is also working with Research for Action on an upcoming report documenting the District's "pushout" crisis, in which students feel forced to leave school due to a hostile environment, classes that waste their time, and a culture that doesn't value their experience.

-Dale Mezzacappa

Asian Student Association works to improve race relations

More than a year after the racial violence at South Philadelphia High School, the Asian Students Association of Philadelphia is not slowing down.

The organization, which formed after the 2009 attacks, has traveled to Houston and Washington, D.C., for student conferences and rallied for increased education about diversity and stronger measures to prevent student harassment.

Last December, after the group and other advocates demanded action, the District reached a legal agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission to implement a long-term plan for addressing anti-Asian violence at South Philly.

Some of the agreement's requirements include training staff and students on multicultural awareness, promptly investigating all harassment allegations, and notifying victims and their parents as well as accused students and their parents of any allegations.

"That was one of our most important victories," said the association's secretary, Duong Nghe Ly.

"But we will still observe the District to see if they are doing their job."

Ly said there have been some curriculum improvements at South Philly – Mandarin is now offered as a language option for students – but much more can be done academically to address diversity.

Next, the group plans to put its attention on other high schools, namely Bok and Furness, to help improve their climate.

"We want to create a strong foundation of students who know what to do to prevent school violence" no matter where they go to school, he said.

-Raquel Ronzone

ACTION United report finds more inexperienced teachers

Despite vows and policy changes over the past several years designed to more equitably distribute experienced teachers among the city's high-poverty and lower-poverty schools, the gap is growing wider, according to a report released by ACTION United.

The report, released in December, found that the District as a whole has seen a significant increase in teachers

with less than three years experience – they now comprise nearly a third of all teachers – and that they are still more likely to be teaching in the highest-poverty schools.

Its analysis found that in 2008-09, 25 schools in the top quarter in terms of poverty were in the bottom quarter in the percentage of experienced teachers. And the gap grew in 2009-10 – more of the highest poverty-schools were likely to be in the bottom quarter in percentage of experienced teachers.

The group is calling for the District to change how it calculates individual school budgets by basing them on teachers' actual salaries. Now, one average salary figure is used for all teachers, regardless of how much the teacher actually makes. The average salary method is standard practice nationally but masks the fact that the District is spending less money at schools with an inexperienced staff.

ACTION United says schools should be given the difference between the actual teacher costs in a school and the average to create additional teacher supports, including more mentors, coaches, and professional development.

After seeking a meeting with Superintendent Arlene Ackerman for more than a month to discuss the findings, the group made a public appeal at a December School Reform Commission meeting and got a commitment for a meeting on February 4.

-Dale Mezzacappa

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Why aren't African-centered charters running turnarounds?

Overhauls of inner-city schools are big business nationwide, but some successful school operators are on the sidelines.

by Benjamin Herold

By several measures, Imhotep Institute Charter High School appears to be one of Philadelphia's more successful high schools.

Imhotep sends more of its graduates – 66 percent – to college than any other charter school in the city, according to School District data.

Last year, the school's 525 students, 99 percent of them African American and 87 percent low income, had proficiency rates above 70 percent in reading and math.

Just as importantly, says 10th grader Khaliah Arrington, Imhotep's African-centered approach creates a nurturing atmosphere that more traditional schools can't match.

"They teach you like your family teaches you," says Arrington.

"At other schools, you might get good academics, but when you go to Imhotep, you learn about yourself."

With the District looking for charter operators with a demonstrated track record to manage its lowest-performing schools – many of which are almost entirely African-American – Imhotep might seem a natural fit.

But during the second year of the Renaissance Schools initiative, neither Imhotep nor any of Philadelphia's six other African-centered school operators will be in the mix.

A national issue

It's not just an issue in Philadelphia.

There are no African-centered school operators in the country participating in the current wave of school turnarounds, says Taki Raton, an adjunct professor of

education at Springfield College in Milwaukee and the founder and former principal of the African-centered Blyden Delany Academy there.

"Ironically, people do not turn to us to do this work," Raton says.

African-centered operators as a group lack the capacity to make sure they have a seat at the table when large reforms like school turnaround are rolled out, he says.

Many are also reluctant to make the necessary compromises in order to participate in such mainstream reform efforts.

Imhotep founder and CEO Christine Wiggins says she was approached by District officials about applying to be a Renaissance provider but decided against it.

"I don't want to play the game," Wiggins says.

Wiggins wants to grow Imhotep, but her preference would be to expand her existing school to accommodate a 500-family waiting list.

That strategy is born in part from deep skepticism of the District's support for the African-centered approach. She says flatly that the District "was not going to approve any [Renaissance applicant] who was culturally relevant."

A different approach

The four Renaissance providers who took over schools last fall employ a set of common practices.

While distinct, each emphasizes an "achievement-focused" school culture and remediation of basic skills, and each relies heavily on student performance data to guide instruction.

Imhotep, on the other hand, uses a student-centered approach to give students a "total immersion in their culture," says Wiggins.

"We tell the whole story, which says that all humankind started on the continent of Africa, and we find out what's important to [students] and use that love to stimulate [their] want for learning."

The school uniform at Imhotep is black pants and a dashiki, and the halls are lined with flags of African nations. Lessons in all subjects are infused with African history, and all students take part in a "rites of passage" process focused on formally preparing them for adulthood.

Students are prepared not just for standardized tests or even college, says Wiggins, but to become "intellectual warriors."

That kind of focus on creating a positive racial identity can make a big difference for Black children, says Howard Stevenson, an education professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

"If you have a school that is teaching race consciousness, it can help [students] emotionally and academically," Stevenson says.

"Kids develop coping strategies, and they don't feel like they have to overreact – or underreact – to stressful situations."

But while there are highly regarded African-centered schools in many cities across the country, including Philadelphia, Chicago, and Kansas City, there has not yet been any national research systematically assessing the model's effectiveness.

In fact, there is no general agreement on the number of African-centered schools currently operating, in part because there are no broadly accepted criteria for what constitutes "true" African-centeredness.

Those realities point to a deeper cause of African-centered schools' marginalization in wider school reform efforts, says Amefika Geuka, co-founder of the Joseph Little-Nguzo Saba Charter School in West Palm Beach, Fla.

"It's been extremely difficult to get [African-centered] charter operators to come together," Geuka says.

Last year, at age 69, Geuka walked 1,069 miles from West Palm Beach to Washington, D.C., to raise awareness about the need for African-centered education for Black children, but the impact of his effort was limited.

"You have Black folks who say they want a better education for their children, but they can't define what they mean by that," says Geuka.

(continued on page 11)

REACHING OUT FOR THE BROTHERS!

'Kasserian Ingera' is a Massai greeting asking the question, "Are the children well?" It reflects the African cultural custom embodied in the proverb – *Children are the reward of life!*

Unfortunately, as we look at the reality confronting us, we as adults and caretakers of our children's futures are forced to answer with a resounding, "**NO**, collectively speaking, our children, particularly Black children, and especially Black male children, are not well!"

Now what can be done? The search for answers to this question, from the perspective of young Black males, is what this space is all about! We have sounded the call and reached out to a cadre of Brothers to seek their VOICE. They will join the charge and seek to heal the hurt of children, families and communities and undertake the journey that will allow us to soon answer, again resoundingly, "**YES**, our children, Black children, and the Brothers, are well!" Looking Forward.

What will it take to get programs to consider the particular and challenging needs of young Black men who have been marginalized and vilified by society? How can these programs and services be assessed for their ability to effectively work for and with those most in need of their programs and services? Is what these programs currently offer in concert with what young Black men need in order to critique, challenge and make it in society? What can be done to enhance the services being offered to young Brothers in the city of Philadelphia? Join us as we reach out to the brothers to seek answers to these, and other, profound questions.

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African-centered

(continued from page 10)

African-centered school operators have struggled to build collective capacity, he adds, partly because of old ideological debates and partly because of the demands of running their schools.

Geuka contends that whatever the challenges, African-centered operators are “showing no vision whatsoever.”

“It’s going to be as lucrative to have a charter to operate a public school as it is to have a franchise to operate a McDonald’s. We need to have schools in order to make sure we are in a position to get our children’s proportionate share of the resources.”

The fast-growing network of so-called “No Excuses” charter schools provides a powerful counterexample.

Charter management organizations like KIPP and Philadelphia-based Mastery Charter Schools – both founded and headed by White men – already operate numerous schools, with plans to grow even more.

Major philanthropic groups like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have supported their expansions. Independent capacity-building organizations like the New Schools Venture Fund support the replication and dissemination of their models.

The best-established “No Excuses” provider, KIPP, operates 99 schools serving 27,000 students – 95 percent of them



Benjamin Herold

Imhotep Institute Charter High School 10th grader Briana Brownlee. The school strives to offer students “a total immersion in their culture.”

African-American or Latino.

“I have no competition with a KIPP or a Mastery, because I don’t have the money to have a competition with them,” says Wiggins.

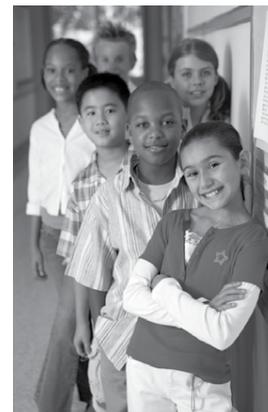
“We’re all just trying to fight for our lives.”

Freelance writer Benjamin Herold is a member of the Notebook editorial board. Notebook coverage of African-centered schools is underwritten by AAKT Concepts (www.aaktconcepts.com).

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Algunas escuelas experimentan un renacer

Aunque algunas están en camino a ser demolidas, en toda la ciudad hay ejemplos de escuelas viejas y abandonadas que se están usando de manera creativa.

por JoAnn Greco, PlanPhilly

Pisos de madera de pino amarillo se extienden a través de apartamentos llenos de detalles arquitectónicos como ventanas extra grandes, techos con vigas y zócalos detallados. En el techo una amplia terraza ofrece vistas perfectas del centro de la ciudad, mientras que en uno de los pisos inferiores, un cuarto de recreación y ejercicios espera al dueño del apartamento en *Hawthorne Lofts*, ubicado en la esquina de las calles 12 y Fitzwater.

Sin embargo, no hace mucho tiempo este era otro edificio vacío en medio de los escombros de un vecindario en transición: la Escuela Nathaniel Hawthorne, construida en 1909, incluida en 1966 en el registro nacional de lugares históricos y cerrada desde hace mucho tiempo.

Mientras los funcionarios del Distrito están enfrentando 70,000 pupitres vacíos y considerando escuelas para posibles cierres, la pregunta de cómo y si se deben usar los edificios cerrados tendrá un impacto grande en el aspecto físico de la ciudad, dice Gary Jastrzab, director ejecutivo de la Comisión de Planificación de la Ciudad de Filadelfia.

Desde una perspectiva de planificación, esto es “tan alentador como es de esperar”. “Hay buenas oportunidades para servirle a la comunidad (desde desarrollos de vivienda y escuelas *chárter* hasta oficinas municipales) y compensar parcialmente el coraje y la decepción que están asociados con el cierre de una escuela”.

El desarrollo de los apartamentos Hawthorne Lofts ocurrió en un momento crítico de la esperada revitalización del vecindario. Las torres Martin Luther King habían sido destruidas para construir viviendas *módicas* estilo *townhouse*, y la vecina comunidad de Bella Vista estaba disfrutando de precios *récord* en bienes raíces. El área, conocida como Hawthorne, parecía estar lista para el redesarrollo.

Y Tony Rufo lo sabía. Después de heredar algunas viviendas de familia, se dispuso a comprar y renovar otras en el vecindario. Todo el tiempo, dice, “la escuela estaba ahí”. El edificio, que fue cerrado en los 80, nunca había sido redesarrollado por completo por quienes lo compraron. Cuando volvió a estar a la venta, Rufo aprovechó el momento. Hace varios meses, el constructor y desarrollador de Conshohocken terminó de convertirlo en 53 apartamentos *loft* que ofrecen cocinas con topes de granito y enseres de acero inoxidable.

Costó mucho, dijo, “pero el edificio es tan bonito, tiene paredes gruesas, ventanas enormes y una fachada fantástica”. Hasta la fecha, más o menos una tercera parte de las unidades se han vendido; los precios varían desde \$160,000 hasta \$340,000.

Sin embargo, cambiar los edificios



JoAnn Greco

Aunque hay planes para desarrollar el edificio de la antigua Escuela Superior Edison en la Avenida Lehigh, por ahora está llena de basura.

a apartamentos de lujo quizás no sea el uso preferido en todas las comunidades. “Hay un límite” con respecto a cuántos se pueden construir en la ciudad, notó el Sub-Superintendente del Distrito Escolar Leroy Nunery.

Como ejemplo, un par de millas al norte en la esquina de las calles 8 y Lehigh hay un imponente edificio construido en el siglo 19 y adornado con torres almenadas y una pandilla de gárgolas. Esta estructura, que originalmente fue la Escuela Superior Northeast, luego la Escuela Superior Thomas A. Edison y finalmente la Escuela Intermedia Julia de Burgos hasta el 2003, está bajo contrato de venta por \$600,000 a *Mosaic Development Partners LLC*, una compañía que se especializa en proyectos designados para revitalizar comunidades en dificultades.

Mosaic le dijo a la Comisión de Planificación de la Ciudad que demolerá el edificio original de la escuela para construir un supermercado y convertirá una de las secciones más nuevas del edificio en vivienda para personas en la tercera edad. Por el momento el lugar tiene las ventanas rotas y está repleto de llantas, periódicos viejos y *graffiti*.

“Estos edificios a menudo son símbolos en sus vecindarios”, observó el arquitecto Joseph Denegre, principal en la compañía CDA&I del centro de la ciudad, la cual ha ayudado a actualizar a más de 30 escuelas del Distrito. “Pero al mismo tiempo, representan el descuido que han sufrido esas comunidades”.

Aunque el plantel Edison/deBurgos quizás renazca, los edificios como ese presentan “la dura realidad de que puede ser sumamente difícil encontrarles un uso nuevo que no sea como vivienda”, Denegre said. “Y lamentablemente ese uso está sujeto a las fuerzas del mercado”.

No importa donde estén, los edificios no se deben dar por perdidos, enfatizó Jastrzab. Él citó la conversión que ganó un premio en 1990 de la Escuela

Thomas Dunlap, un elegante edificio de piedra en la esquina de las calles 51 y Race. El Distrito le transfirió la propiedad a la iglesia *Sanctuary Church of the Open Door* a cambio de un pago simbólico. Después de consultar con la comunidad y con expertos locales de bienes raíces, los dueños decidieron que lo que más se necesitaba eran viviendas *módicas* para adultos de la tercera edad. Hoy en día, los *Dunlap Apartments* ofrecen 35 unidades de una habitación y encajan perfectamente en medio de la comunidad principalmente residencial.

Jastrzab también ve potencial ahora que el gobierno de la ciudad se está esforzando por llevar su propio inventario de capital “al tamaño correcto”, lo cual, dice él, incluiría la demolición de edificios municipales obsoletos. “¿No sería excelente que pudiéramos poner, digamos, una biblioteca, un centro recreativo y una clínica de salud en el mismo edificio?” preguntó. Los edificios de escuelas a menudo son un componente básico de una comunidad urbana, señaló, y los residentes ya dependen de ellos para todo, desde reuniones de la comunidad hasta como centros electorales.

De todos modos, a veces la demolición es la mejor solución, y ese es el plan para la Escuela Intermedia *Wanamaker*, un edificio vacante de pocos pisos hecho de ladrillos y granito construido en la década de los 50.

Una compañía local (WRT) originalmente tenía planes de incorporar el edificio a su concepto para un centro nuevo de usos múltiples en la esquina de la avenida Cecil B. Moore y la calle 11. Pero después de evaluar la estructura, incluyendo sus materiales tóxicos, “comenzó a tener más sentido la idea de demolerlo”, dijo Gil Rosenthal, representante de la WRT. “Fue difícil encontrar usos para los espacios grandes de la escuela, como el teatro y el gimnasio. La pregunta de los desarrolladores en-

tonces fue ¿vale la pena el costo de las renovaciones?”

Por su configuración particular, pasillos extra anchos y espacios especialmente delineados, los edificios de escuelas pueden de hecho ser “aves raras”. A menudo el único interesado es una escuela *chárter*.

Eso no es problema para Nunery, que dijo si y cuando llegara el momento de poner los edificios escolares en venta, la intención no es vendérselos al mejor postor, sino “buscar primero las opciones educativas”.

A veces, sin embargo, los desarrolladores y los educadores pelean por conseguir un edificio atractivo.

En 2006, una escuela *chárter* fue parte de guerra de ofertas con un desarrollador de condominios por un edificio escolar construido en 1911 en la esquina de las calles 16 y Lombard. La *Independence Charter School* perdió, pero más tarde consiguió el edificio pagándole el precio más alto (\$6 millones) al desarrollador Miles & Generalis, que decidió cancelar sus planes en vista a la oposición de la comunidad.

“Estábamos furiosos. Parecía que no tenían interés alguno en ofrecerle un descuento a la escuela *chárter*”, dijo Terry Gillen, un asesor clave del Alcalde Nutter y líder de la comunidad en ese momento. “Pero seguimos haciendo presión porque sentíamos que esta comunidad realmente necesitaba una escuela”.

Hoy, la escuela Independence tiene una matrícula de 770 estudiantes de Kinder – 8vo grado provenientes de 46 códigos postales. De acuerdo con la CEO Jurate Krokys, el comité de instalaciones de la escuela visitó unos 20 edificios (incluyendo la antigua escuela Hawthorne) antes de descubrir que el de la Escuela Elemental Durham, vacante por más o menos cinco años, estaba en el mercado.

La escuela *chárter* invirtió otros \$11+ millones en el edificio, dijo Krokys, incluyendo ventanas nuevas, baños, rampas y un elevador. Pintados en tonos alegres de azul marino y amarillo limón, los pasillos y salones de la escuela tienen detalles especiales como gabinetes integrados y puertas deslizantes. Los pisos de los pasillos tienen losas negras de concreto en forma de diamante, mientras que los salones tienen largas franjas de madera de pino. En pocas palabras, es el uso perfecto de un edificio centenario en la comunidad.

“No hay duda que estos edificios viejos tienen valor”, dijo el arquitecto Denegre. “Fueron magníficamente construidos, tienen mucho espacio, y tienen las calidades que hoy en día se conocen como ‘verdes’, tales como acceso a transporte público y ventilación, luz y aislamiento naturales”.

¿Ya no son útiles para el Distrito Escolar? Quizás no. Pero con imaginación e inversión, se pueden reinventar.

JoAnn Greco es una redactora contribuidora de PlanPhilly, el cual colaboró con el Notebook en esta edición. Comuníquese con ella visitando www.joanngreco.com.

Traducción por Mildred S. Martínez.

70,000 pupitres vacíos: ¿Dónde están?

Más de 70 escuelas están operando a menos de 60% de capacidad y varias a menos de 30%.

por Paul Jablow

Para obtener un poco de perspectiva sobre el problema de pupitres vacíos en el Distrito Escolar de Filadelfia, un buen punto de partida es la Escuela Superior Germantown.

Está operando a menos de 25% de capacidad: tiene menos de 900 estudiantes en un edificio diseñado para más de 3,000. Entre 2005 y 2010 perdió 659 estudiantes.

En un informe reciente presentado al Distrito Escolar y la Comisión de Reforma Escolar, la URS Corporation y DeJong Richter calcularon que hay 70,000 pupitres vacíos en el Distrito.

Los funcionarios escolares rechazaron compartir inmediatamente las últimas cifras de capacidad y uso por escuela que resultaron del informe. "El Distrito publicará los datos de las escuelas individuales para el público en febrero", dijo Elizabeth Childs, portavoz del Distrito.

Sin embargo, al comparar la matrícula actual con un grupo de cifras de capacidad que el Distrito le proporcionó a la Comisión de Planificación de la Ciudad en el 2010, el *Notebook* pudo tener una idea del exceso en pupitres.

En el Distrito, unas 30 escuelas están operando sobre su capacidad. Otras 60 escuelas están operando a capacidad o casi – entre 80% y 110%.

Al otro extremo del espectro, más de 70 están operando a 60% de capacidad o menos. Un pequeño número, como la Superior Germantown, están operando a 30% o menos.

El problema es más grave en las escuelas superiores. Más o menos 20,000 de los pupitres están entre 15 de las escuelas superiores de la ciudad (las que antes eran escuelas grandes integradas) y el exceso más grande está en Germantown, King, Overbrook y University City.

Otros ejemplos de escuelas con salones vacíos:

- La Escuela Elemental William Levering en Roxborough tuvo una matrícula de 194 estudiantes, menos de 30% de su capacidad de 606.

- La Escuela Intermedia Anna Shaw en el oeste de Filadelfia está operando a 28% de capacidad, con 238 estudiantes y 864 pupitres.

- La Escuela Superior William Penn, diseñada para 2,400 estudiantes, es una de varias propiedades del Distrito que están vacías esperando la decisión sobre qué hacer con ellas.

Aunque los funcionarios del Distrito Escolar dicen que una escuela que está operando muy por debajo de su capacidad no será necesariamente cerrada, el Sub-Superintendente Leroy Nunery dice que es algo que alerta al Distrito, el cual está manteniendo un plan físico masivo y costoso con mucho más espacio para estudiantes del que necesita



Harvey Finkle

Con todos los pupitres vacíos actualmente, cada vez hay más escuelas medio vacías y salones que no se están utilizando, especialmente en las escuelas intermedias y superiores.

Entre las más vacías

Por categoría, estas son las escuelas que están operando a menos capacidad, comparando las cifras de capacidad del Distrito Escolar para el 2010 con la matrícula en el otoño de 2010. Estos porcentajes no reflejan las cifras actualizadas de capacidad y uso que se publicarán en febrero.

Escuelas elementales:

- Levering, en Roxborough, 32%
- McMichael, Mantua, 38%
- Kenderton, Tioga, 39%
- Mifflin, East Falls, 39%

Escuelas intermedias:

- Shaw, oeste de Filadelfia, 28%
- E. H. Vare, sur de Filadelfia, 31%
- Beeber, Wynnefield, 35%
- Tilden, suroeste de Filadelfia, 36%

Escuelas superiores:

- Germantown, 27%
- University City, 29%
- Strawberry Mansion, 29%
- Benjamin Franklin, Spring Garden, 34%

ahora y probablemente necesitará en el futuro cercano.

Los 70,000 pupitres vacíos son casi la capacidad del *Lincoln Financial Field*. El informe de la URS dijo que el Distrito había perdido 11,000 estudiantes durante los últimos cinco años y probablemente perderá entre 9,000 y 11,000 más en los próximos cinco debido a las familias que se están mudando de la ciudad, la reducción en la tasa de nacimientos y el crecimiento de las escuelas charter. Se anticipa que la matrícula de las escuelas privadas y parroquiales se mantenga estable o baje un poco.

Un informe de *Athenian Properties* en 2009 había calculado que la cifra de "pupitres vacíos" sería 43,500. Sin embargo, los funcionarios del Distrito dijeron que la URS estaba usando datos más recientes y que la cifra más alta también se le podría atribuir a que están usando una fórmula diferente para

calcular la capacidad en vez de usar los cambios en las tendencias demográficas.

La URS dijo que había calculado la capacidad multiplicando el número de salones en un edificio por la cantidad recomendada de estudiantes por salón y luego por un factor de 75 por ciento para tomar en cuenta otros usos del espacio. El informe dio por sentado que los salones de clase acomodarían 26 estudiantes en los grados elementales y 28 en los superiores.

La cuenta general de salones incluyó las escuelas vacías, el espacio arrendado y los anexos.

La URS encontró que la escuela promedio del Distrito está operando a una capacidad de 67%, muy por debajo del "estándar de mejores prácticas" de 85%.

Ellos calcularon que el uso en las escuelas elementales es 82%, más cerca del estándar. Los pupitres vacíos están concentrados en las escuelas intermedias y superiores, que estaban operando a un 59% de capacidad.

Sin embargo, el *Notebook* identificó unas tres docenas de escuelas elementales que están operando a 60% de capacidad o menos, más de una de cada cinco. Casi la mitad de las escuelas a

60% de capacidad o menos eran escuelas elementales. Por otro lado, más de la mitad de las intermedias tenían al menos un exceso de capacidad de 40%.

No es sorprendente que los pupitres vacíos están concentrados en áreas particulares, especialmente al oeste de Filadelfia y en áreas del norte alrededor de la *Temple University*. Unas 20 escuelas están al menos a 20% sobre su capacidad, muchas de ellas en el noreste. La Elemental Ethan Allen está a 50% sobre la capacidad; la Superior Northeast a 29% sobre la capacidad y la Elemental Laura Carnell está operando a más del doble de su capacidad, con 1,636 estudiantes y 735 pupitres.

Algunas de las escuelas con pupitres vacíos estaban operando más cerca a su capacidad hace algunos años. Al comparar las cifras actuales con la matrícula del Distrito en el 2005, University City perdió más de la mitad de su matrícula (1,158 estudiantes); la South Philadelphia perdió 743; la King perdió 566.

En una entrevista con el *Notebook*, Nunery y la Superintendente Asociada Penny Nixon dijeron que algunas de las escuelas que están operando muy por debajo de su capacidad tienen programas excelentes y serían candidatas para expansión o consolidación en vez de cierre.

Nunery enfatizó que parte del exceso en capacidad podría ser absorbido vendiéndolo o alquilándolo para escuelas charter o uso de la comunidad.

Sin embargo, dadas las instalaciones que ahora está operando, no hay un escenario en el que el Distrito pueda llenar suficientes de sus pupitres vacíos.

Paul Jablow es un redactor independiente basado en Bryn Mawr.
Traducción por Mildred S. Martinez.

Los funcionarios dijeron que algunas escuelas que están operando a mucho menos de su capacidad tienen programas excelentes y serían candidatas para expansión o consolidación.

SCHOOL CALENDAR	2010-2011	CALENDARIO DE LA ESCUELA
2/21	Presidents' Day – Schools/ administrative offices closed	Día de los Presidentes – Escuelas/ oficinas administrativas cerradas
4/18-4/22	Spring recess – Schools closed	Vacaciones de Primavera – Escuelas cerradas
5/17	Staff Only – Professional development day	No hay clases – Día de desarrollo profesional para personal
5/30	Memorial Day – Schools/ administrative offices closed	Día de la Recordación – Escuelas/ oficinas administrativas cerradas
6/17	Last day for pupils	Último día de clases
6/20	Last day for staff – Organization day	Último día de trabajo para los maestros – Día Organizacional



Patrick Galley

McCall Elementary School 4th grader Andrew Rizzo-Reidy (right) practices arranging cups during a meeting of the school's speed stacking club, as (from left) 2nd graders Hayden Huston and Lerieng Nguyen and 4th grader Jordan Bingham watch. Speed stacking, now taught in more than 30 District schools, is a competitive sport recognized worldwide. Mark Sykes, McCall's health and physical education coach, oversees the club. The sport supports right-brain development, concentration, fine-motor control, and sequencing skills. One study found significant improvements in the hand-eye coordination, reaction time, and test scores of students who regularly practiced speed stacking.

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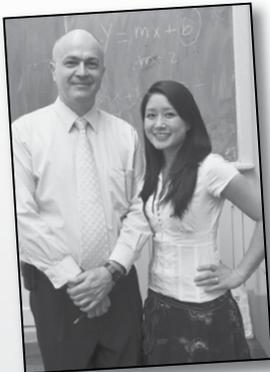
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Facing costly repairs, District takes aim at empty seats

The School District says it must “begin reducing the number of ‘empty seats’ through building closures, program consolidations and co-location.”

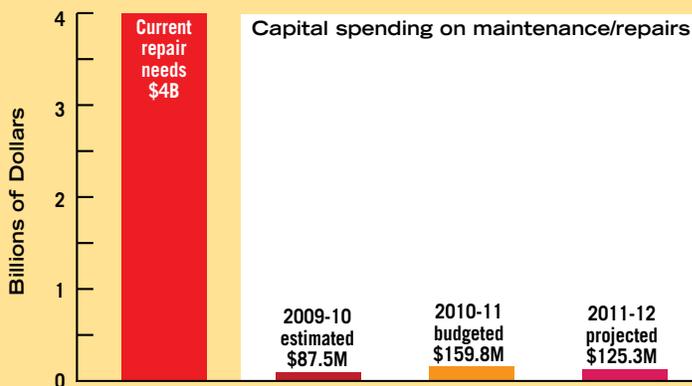
The District says these 11 factors will guide its decisions:

- Educational planning guidelines
- Utilization and facility condition
- Enrollment trends
- Adaptive reuse
- Parent and community feedback
- Charter schools
- Neighborhood considerations
- Historic preservation
- Accessibility to programs
- School performance
- Transportation

The District offers these reasons to close and consolidate programs:

- “Program enhancement - better populated schools can yield greater academic program offerings and opportunities for students.
- “Resource efficiencies - better utilization of staff and specialists to support teaching and learning & support services for students.
- “Program realignment - improve access by eliminating redundancy; repurpose available resources for emerging and unique programs of study.
- “Service alignment - improve maintenance and custodial services; prioritize capital schedule & expenditures; revise transportation services.”

At the current pace, it will take decades for the District to address its capital maintenance needs.



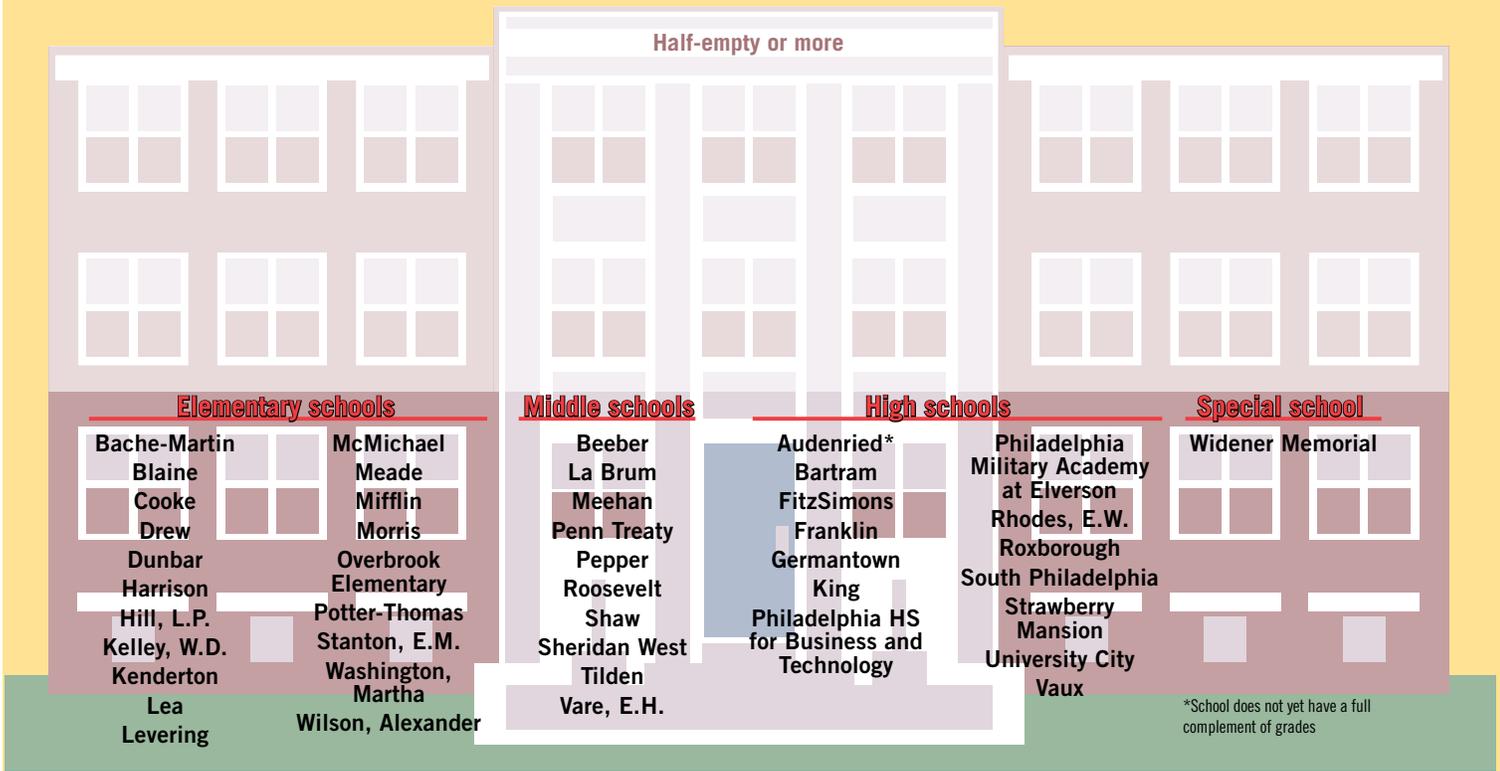
Source: School District Capital Budget, May 2010. Excludes new construction, new additions, administration support.

At most District buildings, the index measuring capital repair needs is low or moderate. At 26 buildings the needs are high.

	Low FCI	Medium FCI	High FCI
Elementary School	58	99	21
Middle School	18	12	1
Middle Secondary*	5	2	0
High School	33	23	1
Other**	10	0	3
Total buildings:	124	136	26

FCI = Facilities Condition Index (cost of repairs divided by cost of building replacement)
 * denotes schools with grades 5-12 or 7-12
 ** includes early childhood, disciplinary, and special schools.

45 schools are more than half empty...



Closing time

(continued from page 1)

schools, but have not said which will count the most. They declined to give the *Notebook* up-to-date school capacity and facilities condition data for this edition.

They acknowledge that there could be school closings as early as September. Yet they say that “late spring” is the earliest communities might hear the fate being considered for their schools: closing, consolidation, feeder pattern changes, renovations, a different grade configuration – or even expansion.

When pressed in January, officials were reluctant to say outright that closings are imminent. Asked whether it was “inevitable” that some buildings would close, Deputy Superintendent Leroy Nunery replied, “I don’t know if it’s inevitable. It’s possible.”

What is known from information released so far is that schools are underenrolled in most areas of the city.

There are a few overcrowded pockets

– mostly in the Northeast, Olney, Kensington, and some of the river wards. On average, elementary schools are at about 82 percent capacity while middle and high schools are at 59 percent capacity, as opposed to an ideal of 85 percent.

And while school utilization generally reflects neighborhood demographics, that’s not the whole story. In every part of the city, at least 25 percent of the students transfer out of their neighborhood high school; in most areas it is more than 50 percent.

Six planning regions

For planning purposes, school officials have divided the city into six areas: Southwest, West, South-Central, North-Central, Northwest, and Northeast, the better to deal with their “different challenges,” according to Associate Superintendent Penny Nixon.

She said they want to provide options in each region that minimize student travel for high school, but also let parents choose between small schools and larger ones, K-8s and middle schools, and

different academic, career and technical programs. They are also considering the impact on special education, early childhood, and athletics, Nixon said.

In August, officials began discussions with charter school operators, politicians, community development organizations, and civic associations. At the same time, URS Corporation and DeJong Richter were conducting a demographic, enrollment, and building analysis.

In late fall, officials held regional meetings that were attended by about 500 people. Rather than talk about closings, the District asked participants to list “must haves” for any school in terms of academic programs, amenities like libraries, and conditions relating to climate.

“We wanted to explain the complex issue that the District is dealing with in regards to empty seats, but also explain that this process was about optimizing educational program options as much as it was about bricks

and mortar,” said Danielle Floyd, deputy for strategic planning initiatives.

At a second set of 10 meetings in early February in the regions, attendees were to be given a summary of their original feedback, asked what additional data they’d like to see and their concerns about the process, and asked to rank their “must haves,” rating art and music against athletics, for instance.

During or after the second rounds of meetings, the District may share data about school utilization and facility conditions. URS has compiled a “facilities condition index” assessing repair and renovation costs for each building. A report to the SRC said that while most schools are in fair condition, the overall cost of capital repairs is in the \$4 billion range. At 26 schools, the cost of needed repairs approaches or exceeds the cost of replacement. Most schools, 136, were in the “fair” range, and 124 had relatively good scores, meaning that repair costs would be low.

But the District did not release the ratings for individual schools.

No timeframe was set for the third set of meetings, when, presumably, people will finally be presented specific options.

The school code requires a public hearing at least 90 days before a school is closed. And there could be more than a few.

“If you look at ... Kansas City and other places, they did everything in one fell swoop. They took all their hits in one year, and that’s an approach that you think about,” Nunery said.



Leroy Nunery

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Factors considered for closing

While not weighting their importance, the District has outlined a list of factors that will be used in determining each school’s future: enrollment vs. capacity; scores on the facility condition index; compliance with requirements relating to building accessibility and classroom size; and amenities such as a cafeteria, gym, and library. Other factors include its suitability for reuse – community or commercial – and whether it is in the special historic district, which qualify-

(continued on page 19)

Facilities Master Plan

Parent/community meetings

Tuesday, February 1

Penrose | 2515 S. 78th St. | 6 pm

Wednesday, February 2

Kensington CAPA | 1901 N. Front St. | 6 pm

Thursday, February 3

Germantown HS | 40 E. High St. | 6 pm

Saturday, February 5

HS of the Future | 4021 Parkside Ave. | 10 am

Tuesday, February 8

Saul HS | 7100 Henry Ave. | 6 pm

Wednesday, February 9

South Philadelphia HS | 2101 S. Broad St. | 6 pm

Thursday, February 10

Samuel Fels HS | 5500 Langdon St. | 6 pm

Saturday, February 12

Lincoln HS | 3201 Ryan Ave. | 10 am

Tuesday, February 15

Temple U. HealthCare - Student Center | 3400 N. Broad St. | 6 pm

Thursday, February 17

South Philadelphia HS | 2101 S. Broad St. | 6 pm

Registration starts 30 minutes before meeting time.

Closing time

(continued from page 18)

fies it for a redevelopment tax break.

Student accessibility to other specialized programs, transportation, capacity of area charter schools, “neighborhood dynamics,” and plans of city agencies and nearby institutions are also considerations.

Finally, the school’s academic performance is a significant factor. Low-occupancy schools that are doing well may be expanded rather than closed.

“If there’s 25 percent occupancy, but if you have the right program, the right principal, the right teachers, there’s no reason why you can’t have more kids go to that school,” said Floyd.

Renaissance Schools – those undergoing makeovers as Promise Academies and remaining in the District as opposed to being converted into charters – are not immune from potential closing or consolidation in the future, officials said, but all will open in September. Some schools designated as Promise Academies are way below capacity; Germantown High, for instance, is below 30 percent.



Danielle Floyd

close middle schools and convert as many elementary schools as possible into K-8. In his six years, he spent much of a \$2 billion capital program on creating new small high schools and greatly reducing the number of middle schools.

The Vallas administration also did a facilities study, and it also concluded that the District had too much capacity and should close schools.

Instead, he garnered good will by building more. But those days appear to be over.

“This can get difficult,” Girard-diCarlo said. “Communities could get upset. Elected officials could get upset. Some of our constituencies could get upset. We shouldn’t be afraid of that, but be open and transparent and listen.”

“Then we have to make some decisions.”

Contact Notebook Contributing Editor Dale Mezzacappa at dalem@thenotebook.org.

No quick bonanza from school closings

Closing and consolidating schools won’t provide much immediate help to the School District in dealing with its enormous budget gap.

Eventually, by downsizing its physical plant and better coordinating programs, the District should be able to reduce its operating budget. Potential areas for savings include utilities, building maintenance, administrative costs, and student transportation. Capital spending can be focused on fewer buildings and costly ones jettisoned.

But even if the District were able to get rid of one-third of its buildings, it would not reduce its \$3 billion operating budget by anywhere near one-third. The District’s empty classrooms already cost much less than full ones because they don’t require a teacher.

In any event, the District says its goal isn’t simply to cut costs, but to redirect savings from vacant seats to full classrooms.

Deputy Superintendent Leroy Nunery

said the District’s planning process aims both to “rationalize” and “to make sure you can reinvest any money that might be saved into the educational product.” But officials said they had no formula for determining how much they might save.

The District should be able to sell surplus school buildings, especially well-constructed older ones that are suitable for housing (see p. 26). More recent buildings less suitable for conversion could be sold to charter schools.

Again, however, officials say they are not going through this process to bail out the District’s finances.

“I want to really dispel this notion that the District’s first thing, because of the budget circumstances, is to say let’s flip this into cash,” Nunery said. “Quite frankly, the sales cycle on buildings like this is really long, so you don’t get a whole lot of immediate benefit. And the dollar amount you get is not as significant as everybody thinks.”

-Dale Mezzacappa

Historical trends

Cities all over the nation have had to deal with vast demographic shifts of people that have resulted in a hollowing out of once vibrant areas. The landscape has been further changed as public and parochial schools lose students to charters.

Michael O’Neill, who founded the Philadelphia School Partnership to identify and duplicate the best schools, whether they be public, parochial, or charter, said he expected that “some, but not a lot” of closed public school buildings might be suited to charters.

Beyond the persistent reluctance to close schools, Philadelphia is reaping the consequences of other decisions.

Many of the schools built between the 1960s and 1980s were poorly constructed, but the District declined to sue the builders, according to a former high-level District official.

“It became such a huge thing to do, the general counsel wouldn’t touch it,” the official said.

For instance, air conditioning at the Pickett Middle School never worked; Edison High School had a leaky roof for 20 years.

Officials also opted for expensive, state-of-the-art buildings like William Penn High School – now abandoned, with its future uncertain. In 2009, Ackerman dropped a plan to permanently close it.

District leaders had no trouble deciding to build schools like William Penn and University City – plenty of lucrative contracts for construction companies, work for the trade unions, and bond fees for lawyers – but didn’t invest in supporting the full educational experience they were designed for. University City, now a Promise Academy, faces expensive asbestos removal.

Plus, routine and preventive maintenance was often neglected, hastening deterioration and driving up capital costs.

In addition, successive superintendents had shifting educational visions.

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Expert advice on school closings: Offer something better

Community opposition is likely, and concerns are real. Those with experience encourage an open process.

by Bill Hangle, Jr.

The first lesson about school closings is simple: People get mad.

More than three years after the Ada Lewis Middle School closed its doors, Aranda Bethel still is impassioned about it.

"We proved that some of the information that [the District] gave was not true," said Bethel, a Germantown resident who spearheaded the campaign to keep her son's school open.

"If you haven't really experienced [a closure], and seen how it changes the makeup of your community, you don't understand."

It was early 2007 when District officials first proposed the Ada Lewis closure, based on low enrollment and an estimated \$38 million repair bill. Bethel believed fervently that the school was worth saving. She and her supporters became a fixture at School Reform Commission meetings, contesting everything from the District's public notification process – far too cursory, they said – to its high repair estimates.

"We had two engineers there for three and a half hours," recalled Lewis Harris, a community activist who organized a team of contractors to inspect the school. "From the roof to the floors, everywhere."

But District officials stood by their

estimates and argued that another neighborhood school had room for Ada Lewis students. In June 2007, the SRC voted unanimously for closure.

To this day, Bethel and her supporters think they never had a chance.

"We believe that arrangements were already made to close the building, and nothing parents had to say was taken seriously," said Venard Johnson, a longtime education activist.

Ada Lewis now sits empty. District officials say they have no plans for it yet. Bethel said she calls regularly to complain about weeds, trash, and vagrants.

And when she considers the District's new facilities master plan, Bethel fears that other parents will soon share her experience.

"They're still doing the same thing," Bethel said. "They're trying to make it look like they're including us, but they really aren't."

District: Nothing's predetermined

District officials say fears like Bethel's are understandable, but unfounded. They say there is no secret list of schools slated for closure.

"Everybody always thinks we have a list," said Deputy for Strategic Initiatives Danielle Floyd. "I don't have a list."

They won't even say that closings are guaranteed, despite an estimated 70,000 surplus seats. "I don't know if [closures are] inevitable, but it's possible," said



Bill Hangle, Jr.

Nearly four years after its closure, Ada Lewis Middle School in East Germantown continues to sit empty. The District has yet to decide what to do with the building.

Deputy Superintendent Leroy Nunery. "You're going to have ranges of things to do: closure, consolidation, renovation."

But Floyd and Nunery also say that the Ada Lewis experience shows that the District must do a better job of communicating with parents and making its case for changes.

"One of the things we did learn when we did our homework is, if you're going to close something, or change what's there, you have to offer something better," said Nunery. "We keep that right in front of us."

Tom Brady, who served as Philadelphia's interim superintendent when Ada Lewis was closed, says that's the right place to start.

"As soon as you decide to close a school, it becomes the best school in the world," said Brady, who has been part of closures in Virginia, Washington D.C., and Providence, R.I., where he is now superintendent. "Parents, graduates, and grandparents will rally. No matter what estimates you come up with, there will be experts who will come in and refute you. That's part of the deal."

"So what we learned from six months of meetings every night [in D.C.] is, you have to create a better scenario for kids," said Brady. "You have to say, 'We're going to close School A, and School B will have the following academic improvements – more teachers, more art, more

(continued on page 21)



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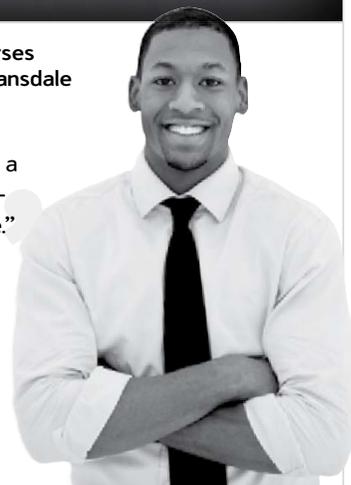
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Expert advice

(continued from page 20)

PE.' People aren't going to throw roses, but reasonable parents, if you explain in graphic terms how the improvement's going to benefit them, they'll come around."

Brady says there was no predetermined fate for Ada Lewis, and that District officials gave an honest and accurate accounting of the school's condition. "It wasn't a done deal," he said. "Like all closures, it was very controversial, but I believe there were enough facts on the table."

But that, Brady says, highlights another important lesson: When it comes to a community asset like a school, facts alone are not enough. He cites an experience in Fairfax County, Va., early in his career. "I had all the facts, I had all the engineers giving me reports – and I didn't have a clue of the political landscape," Brady said. "I got killed. They hired engineers to prove that my facts were wrong."

"That was my introduction to this

business, and it was very painful, but very clear: Facts in and of themselves don't win the day," Brady said. "It has to be a full and transparent engagement."

Rights are at stake

Mary Filardo, head of the 21st Century School Fund in Washington, says anti-closing sentiment must be taken seriously. After being involved with closures in D.C. and Chicago, she's learned that the roots of opposition run deep.

"These issues around closings, charters, and transformations are as charged as *Brown vs. Board of Education*," said Filardo. "It is the same issue – where do you have the right to go to school? If they turn a school in your neighborhood into a charter school, is your right to enter a lottery the same as your right to walk to the front door and say, 'I want my child to go here'?"



Tom Brady

"[Some] people are dismissing the opposition, saying, 'Oh, they just don't want their schools closed.' But really, they don't want their rights abridged."

Layered on top of that, Filardo says, are practical questions that districts must handle forthrightly: Is my child's new school better? Is it accessible? Can my child get there safely? These are no small matters.

"In Chicago, they really put kids in harm's way, in terms of their travel [to new schools]," said Filardo.

"There was one case where a kid was killed walking through gang territory."

Finally, Filardo says districts must be prepared to address questions of corruption. Wherever she goes, she says, people believe closures are engineered to benefit insiders. That includes some Ada Lewis supporters, who believe charter operators wanted the building. District

officials deny this and say they've only received a few cursory inquiries.

"There is definitely a feeling that it's corrupt," Filardo said. "But it's not necessarily that anyone's getting rich. It's just that there aren't actually guidelines around how schools go from being your neighborhood school into a choice school. In the absence of that, it's just who you know."

Like Brady, she says the solution is transparency and engagement. In D.C., clear criteria for proposed closures "made all the difference in the world," she said.

And community groups can be extremely helpful. "The neighborhood people are far more pragmatic than the politicians," Filardo said. "If Arlene Ackerman gives them the information about budgets and space, people will be extremely creative."

In Philadelphia, District officials say they've taken to heart these and other lessons from their research on school closings. They don't want to repeat the Ada Lewis experience, in which a single school's problems fester until an unpopular action is necessary. "People felt targeted, because it wasn't happening elsewhere," said Nunery.

Instead, their strategy is to use the early rounds of community meetings to build support for districtwide improvements, so that when any specific closure or transformation proposals emerge, parents will see them as means to that end.

"When you look at Ada Lewis, what we didn't do very well, and what we're trying to do as part of this process, is [help] people understand both the academic rationale, as well as the operational rationale," said Floyd.

Filardo says that while it's hard to prove that any district's closure policies have translated into improved student performance, closures can provide some tangible benefits. "One of the results of the closings [in D.C.] was that they were able to bring back music and art teachers in all the elementary schools," she said. "A lot of money on the capital side was spent at the receiving schools."

But Tom Brady warns that while closures can save money in the long run, they shouldn't be used to plug short-term budget gaps. "You'll see bean-counters saying, you've got too many schools, close this and you'll save \$4 million," he said. "You've got to say, 'Wait a second – if you want peace in the city, you've got to set aside \$500,000 for extra help [at the new school]. It has to be an investment of time and resources if it's going to be successful.'"

Meanwhile, Arenda Bethel says she'll be watching carefully to see if the District makes good on its promises. She wants it to do a much better job of reaching out to parents – the District announced the first closure hearings for Ada Lewis in a little-noticed classified ad in the *Philadelphia Daily News* – and she wants to see it take their proposals seriously.

"[Parents'] voices need to be heard," she said. "Nobody knows better about how this will affect the community than the people in the community."

Bill Hangle, Jr. is a freelance writer based in West Philadelphia.

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Where are the 70,000 seats?

More than 70 schools are at 60 percent capacity or less. Several are less than one third full.

by Paul Jablow

To get some perspective on the empty seat problem in the School District of Philadelphia, Germantown High School is a good place to start.

With fewer than 900 students in a building designed to hold more than 3,000, it is operating at less than 30 percent capacity. Between 2005 and 2010, it lost 659 students.

In a recent report for the School District and the School Reform Commission, the URS Corporation and De-Jong Richter estimated that there are 70,000 empty seats in the District.

School officials declined to immediately make available the latest school-by-school capacity and utilization figures that were produced for the report. "The District will release data for individual schools directly to the public in February," said Elizabeth Childs, a spokesperson for the District.

But comparing current enrollment numbers with a recent set of school capacity figures provided by the District to the City Planning Commission in

2010, the *Notebook* was able to assemble a picture of the excess seats.

Districtwide, about 30 schools were significantly over capacity. Some 60 schools were at or near capacity – between 80 and 110 percent.

At the other end of the spectrum, more than 70 others were at 60 percent occupancy or less. A handful, like Germantown High, were about one-third full or even less.

The problem is most severe in the high schools. Roughly 20,000 of the excess seats can be found within 15

of the city's formerly huge comprehensive high schools, with the biggest excess at Germantown, King, Overbrook, and University City.

Some more examples of where empty classroom space is found:

Officials said some schools operating well below capacity had outstanding programs and would be candidates for expansion or consolidation.

- William Levering Elementary School in Roxborough had an enrollment of 194 students, less than a third of its capacity of 606.

- Anna Shaw Middle School in West Philadelphia was at 28 percent capacity, with 238 students for 864 seats.

- William Penn High School, designed for 2,400 students, is one of several District properties that sits empty, awaiting a decision about its fate.



Germantown High, able to accommodate more than 3,000 students, now houses fewer than 900.

While School District officials say that a school operating well below capacity won't necessarily be closed, Deputy Superintendent Leroy Nunery says it does set off alarm bells for the District, which is maintaining a massive and costly physical plant that has far more pupil space than it needs now and is likely to need in the foreseeable future.

The 70,000 empty seats are almost exactly the capacity of Lincoln Financial Field.

The URS report said that the District had lost 11,000 students over the past five years and would likely lose from 9,000 to 11,000 more in the next five years due to families leaving the city, declining birth rates, and the growth of charter schools. Private and parochial

school enrollment was expected to remain stable or decline slightly.

A 2009 report by Athenian Properties had estimated the "empty seat" count at 43,500. But District officials said that URS was using more current data, and that the larger figure could also be attributed to their using a different formula to calculate capacity rather than to changes in demographic trends.

URS said it had estimated capacity by multiplying a building's classroom count by the recommended class size and then by a factor of 75 percent to allow for other space usage. The report assumed that classrooms would accommodate 26 students in lower grades, 28 in higher grades.

Their overall classroom count in-
(continued on page 23)

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school closings

Among the emptiest

By category, here are the schools that are farthest below capacity, comparing 2010 capacity figures from the School District with fall 2010 enrollment. These percentages do not reflect the recently updated capacity and utilization figures.

Elementary schools:

- Levering, in Roxborough, 32 percent.
- McMichael, Mantua, 38 percent.
- Kenderton, Tioga, 39 percent.
- Mifflin, East Falls, 39 percent.

Middle schools:

- Shaw, West Philadelphia, 28 percent.
- E. H. Vare, South Philadelphia, 31 percent.
- Beeber, Wynnefield, 35 percent.
- Tilden, Southwest Philadelphia, 36 percent.

High schools:

- Germantown, 27 percent.
- University City, 29 percent.
- Strawberry Mansion, 29 percent.
- Benjamin Franklin, Spring Garden, 34 percent.

70,000 seats

(continued from page 22)

cluded empty school buildings, leased space, and annexes.

URS found that the average District school is operating at 67 percent capacity, well below the “best practice standard” of 85 percent.

They estimated utilization in K-5 schools at 82 percent, close to the best practice standard. Underutilization was concentrated in middle and high schools, which were operating at 59 percent.

But the *Notebook* identified some three dozen elementary schools operating at 60 percent capacity or less, more than one in five. About half the schools at 60 percent capacity or less were elementary schools. But over half the middle schools – 16 of 25 – had at least 40 percent excess capacity.

Not surprisingly, empty seats are concentrated in particular areas, especially West Philadelphia and ar-

reas of North Philadelphia around Temple University. About 20 schools are at least 20 percent above capacity, many of them in the Northeast. Ethan Allen Elementary is 50 percent over; Northeast High School, 29 percent over, and Laura Carnell Elementary, operating at more than twice its capacity, with 1,636 students for 735 seats.

Some of the underutilized schools were much closer to capacity a few years ago. Comparing current numbers to District enrollment figures from 2005, University City lost over half its enrollment, 1,158 students; South Philadelphia's enrollment declined by 743; King's by 566.

In an interview with the *Notebook*, Nunery and Associate Superintendent Penny Nixon said that some schools operating well below capacity had outstanding programs and would be candidates for expansion or consolidation rather than closure.

Nunery stressed that some excess capacity could be absorbed by selling or leasing it for charter schools or community uses.

But given the facilities it now operates, there is no scenario in which the District can come anywhere close to filling its empty seats.

Paul Jablow is a freelance writer based in Bryn Mawr.

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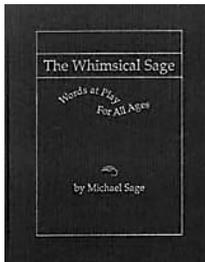
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Some shuttered schools experience rebirth

While some are doomed to demolition, across the city are examples of old, abandoned schools that have been put to creative uses.

by JoAnn Greco, PlanPhilly

Yellow heart pine floors stretch across apartments filled with architectural details like oversized windows, beamed ceilings, and detailed wainscoting. On the roof, a sprawling deck offers perfect views of Center City, while downstairs, a rec room and fitness facility await the condo owner at Hawthorne Lofts, 12th and Fitzwater Streets.

Not long ago, though, this was just another empty building – the Nathaniel Hawthorne School, built in 1909, entered on the National Register of Historic Places in 1966, and long since closed – set amidst the ragged debris of a neighborhood in transition.

As District officials deal with 70,000 empty seats and review schools for potential closure, the question of how and whether to reuse shuttered buildings will have great impact on the physical face of the city, says Gary Jastrzab, executive director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

From a planning perspective, this “is about as exciting as we can hope for,” he said. “There are great opportunities to serve the neighborhood in ways – from housing developments to charter schools to co-located municipal facilities – that offset some of the anger and disappointment associated with a school closing.”

The development of Hawthorne Lofts came at a critical point in the neighborhood’s hoped-for revitalization. The Martin Luther King towers had been imploded in favor of townhouse-style affordable housing, and the next-door Bella Vista neighborhood was



The old Hawthorne School, built in 1909, was recently converted to luxury loft-style apartments.

Harvey Finkle

enjoying record real estate prices. The area, called Hawthorne, seemed ripe for

redevelopment.

Tony Rufo knew that. After inheriting some family homes, he set off on a career of buying and renovating others in the neighborhood. All along, he says, “the school was in my wake.” Closed since the 1980s, the building was never fully redeveloped by subsequent buyers. When it was again offered for sale, Rufo pounced. A few months ago, the Conshohocken-based builder and developer completed the conversion into 53 loft-style apartments sporting granite countertops and stainless steel kitchens.

It was costly, he said, “but it’s such a beautiful old building, with thick walls, huge windows, and a great exterior.” So far, about a third of the units have sold; asking prices range from \$160,000 to \$340,000.

But luxury condos may not be the preferred use in every neighborhood. “There are only so many” that can be built in the city, noted School District Deputy Superintendent Leroy Nunery.

As a prime example, a few miles north, at 8th and Lehigh, stands a compelling, 19th-century fortress that features crenellated towers and a coterie of gargoyles. The original Northeast High School, then Thomas A. Edison High and finally Julia de Burgos Middle School until 2003, the structure is under agreement of sale for \$600,000 to Mosaic Development Partners LLC, which specializes in projects designed to revitalize struggling communities.

Mosaic told the City Planning Commission it will demolish the original part of the school to make room for a supermarket and put senior housing in a newer section of the building. For now, though, the site is awash in a sea

(continued on page 25)

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Rebirth

(continued from page 24)

of discarded tires and newspapers, covered in graffiti and sporting smashed-out windows.

“These buildings are often icons in their neighborhoods,” observed architect Joseph Denegre, principal at the Center City firm CDA&I, which has helped update more than 30 District schools. “But, at the same time, they become symbolic of the neglect that those neighborhoods have suffered.”

Although the Edison/deBurgos site might be reborn, buildings like it present “the hard reality that it can be very difficult to find a new use for them, except for housing,” Denegre said. “And unfortunately that use is subject to market forces.”

Regardless of location, the buildings shouldn’t be written off, emphasized Jastrzab. He cites an award-winning 1990 conversion of the Thomas Dunlap School, a stately stone building at 51st and Race Streets. The District transferred the property to the Sanctuary Church of the Open Door for a token fee. After consulting with the community and local real estate experts, the owners decided that affordable senior housing was most needed. Today, The Dunlap Apartments offer 35 one-bedroom units, fitting right into the primarily residential neighborhood.

Jastrzab also sees potential as city government works to “right-size” its own

capital inventory, which could, he says, involve the demolition of obsolete municipal buildings. “Wouldn’t it be great if we could co-locate, say, a library, rec center, and health center in one building?” he asked. School buildings are often a core component of a neighborhood’s urban fabric, he pointed out, and residents already rely on them for everything from attending community meetings to casting votes.

Still, demolition is sometimes the best solution, which is the plan for the vacant Wanamaker Middle School, a low-rise brick and granite 1950s structure.

A local planning firm, WRT, originally intended to incorporate the building into its concept for a new mixed-use project at the corner of Cecil B. Moore Avenue and 11th Street. But after evaluating the structure, including its hazardous materials, “the more it began to make sense to demolish,” said Gil Rosenthal, principal at WRT. “It was hard to find uses for the school’s huge spaces, like the theater and the gym. The question for the developers became, is it worth the cost of the renovations?”

With their meandering layouts, extra-wide hallways, and specially delineated spaces, school buildings can indeed be odd ducks. Often a charter school is the only venue even interested.

That’s fine with Nunery, who said that when and if the time comes to put school buildings on the market, the intent is not to “flip” them to the highest bidder, but to “go to the educational options first.”

Sometimes, though, developers and educators do fight over a desirable building.

In 2006, a charter school engaged in a bitter bidding war with a condo developer for a 1911 school building at 16th and Lombard Streets. Though outbid, Independence Charter School eventually won the building by paying the higher price (\$6 million) to the developer, Miles & Generalis, who decided to forgo its plans in the face of neighborhood opposition.

“We were furious. There seemed to be no interest in offering a discount to the charter,” said Terry Gillen, a key advisor to Mayor Nutter and a neighborhood ward leader at the time. “But we kept the pressure on because we felt like this neighborhood really needed a school.”

Today, Independence enrolls 770 K-8 students from 46 zip codes. According to CEO Jurate Krokys, the charter’s facilities committee walked through about 20 buildings, including Hawthorne, before discovering that the former Durham Elementary School, vacant for about five years, was on the market.

With their meandering layouts, extra-wide hallways, and specially delineated spaces, school buildings can be odd ducks, hard to adapt for other uses.

The charter poured another \$11-plus million into the building, Krokys said, including new windows, bathrooms, ramps and an elevator. Painted in vibrant shades of marine blue and lemon yellow, the school’s hallways and classrooms showcase touches like intricate built-in cabinetry and sliding pocket doors. Its corridor floors are laid with black, diamond-shaped concrete slabs, while classrooms gleam with long strips of pine flooring. It is, in short, as perfect an adaptive re-use of a 100-year-old community asset as one could hope for.

“There’s no doubt that these [older] buildings have value,” said Denegre, the architect. “They’re magnificently built, they have lots of capacity, and they have qualities that today we think of as ‘green,’ like access to public transportation, and natural ventilation, light, and insulation.”

No longer right for the School District? Perhaps not. But with imagination and investment, wholly reinventable.

JoAnn Greco is a contributing writer for PlanPhilly, which partnered with the Notebook on this edition. Contact her at www.joanngreco.com.

WEB  **Michael O’Neill, founder of the Philadelphia School Partnership, thinks that the District’s downsizing represents an opportunity. To read the full interview, go to:**
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Preservationists urge scrutiny of older buildings

Analyze each case, they say, pointing out that a larger structure might be used for multiple functions.

by Alan Jaffe, PlanPhilly

Philadelphia's school buildings have value far beyond their function as educational facilities.

To the preservation community, they are markers of the city's history. To architects, they may be examples of innovative design. To residents, they are neighborhood landmarks and part of the community fabric.

In 1988, 158 Philadelphia schools built between 1818 and 1938 were listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of a special thematic district. They ranged in style from Georgian and Colonial, reflecting American ideals for the new European immigrants; to Classical Revival, aspiring to Olympian achievement; to English Gothic, denoting institutions of great scholarship; to Art Deco and Machine Age, evoking a bright new future.

The national historic designation makes their redevelopment eligible for federal and state tax credits. But only listing on a separate Philadelphia historic register protects them from significant alteration or even demolition.

Any blueprint for the closing of school buildings, according to local preservationists, should include an analysis of each property's historical and architectural sig-

nificance, potential real estate value, and role in the neighborhood.

John Gallery, executive director of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, divides school buildings into three categories.

Many of the buildings on the National Register are elementary schools in residential areas. Besides being eligible for tax credits, these are easy to convert to housing, the most common reuse for former schools. "Forgetting about current economic conditions, those buildings have a lot of real opportunity," Gallery said.

Gallery's second category includes elementary and junior high or middle schools erected during the 1960s. Neither historic nor "the best architectural examples," Gallery said, they are difficult to convert, except to a similar use. The closed Ada Lewis Middle School in East Germantown is a prime example.

The third group consists of the city's large high schools. Their size "makes it hard to figure out how to use them," Gallery said.

A prominent example is the original West Philadelphia High School, a five-story, brick and limestone structure built in 1912 at a cost of \$1.3 million. On the National Register, it was designed by chief school architect Henry deCourcy Richards in the Gothic/Institutional style.

With institutions including Penn, Drexel, and the University City Science Center nearby, Gallery sees potential for

conversion to a multifunction use. "The obvious benefit of it being on the National Register is the ability to get the tax credits. If you tear it down, you're throwing away [access to] millions of dollars."

Gallery and others also want to preserve the modernist William Penn High School, which he thinks could be adapted for use by a combination of occupants. A sprawling complex of five interconnected structures, green courtyards and recreational areas, it was designed by the renowned local architect Romaldo Giurgola. Opened in 1973 as the largest structure and best-equipped school in the city, the facility closed last year due to declining enrollment and deteriorating underground piping.

Jefferson Moak, senior archivist for the National Archives at Philadelphia, wrote the nominations for the 158 city schools that were named to the National Register. And while he doesn't think every historic building can or should be protected, he said the District should make an effort to find developers who can adapt schools to new uses "before just knocking them down." Plus, some should be saved as examples of specific periods in school architecture, he said.

The temporary closing of the concrete behemoth high school on North Broad led to the formation of the Coalition for the Revitalization of William Penn. Coalition member Bunmi Samuel said the community was proud of the school's reputation for superb educators, well-trained gradu-

ates, and extraordinary resources.

The coalition believes a new William Penn could offer a school for the surrounding six neighborhoods, continuing education, and a small business incubator. "This is a perfect place for people to learn, but it was always missing access from a community standpoint," Samuel said.

While making no promises about William Penn, Deputy Superintendent Leroy Nunery said some schools should be reused because of their historical value. And the District's facilities plan documents, while noting a difference between "historic" and "old" buildings, include preservation among some 11 factors (see p. 16) to be considered "when developing options."

The District is "going to end up with a lot of surplus real estate," Gallery said. When deciding which schools to close, there has to be a process determining which are "easy to sell, or convert and contribute to the community."

For a longer version of this story, visit www.planphilly.com. Alan Jaffe is a writer for PlanPhilly, which partnered with the Notebook on this edition.

WEB Notebook photographer Harvey Finkle toured the recently closed William Penn High School building in January. For his pictures of a shuttered school, go to www.thenotebook.org/william-penn-photos

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Remembering greatness

For 30 years, the girls' track team at William Penn embodied excellence.

by Benjamin Herold

Though William Penn High School experienced many changes during the last 30 years, one thing could always be counted on.

No matter what, the girls' track team always ran fast.

Beginning in 1983, the Penn girls reeled off a 20-year regular-season unbeaten streak, winning 18 Public League championships and 18 Pennsylvania Coaches' Association indoor state championships along the way.

Even more impressive, the team set five national scholastic records and reached the finals in at least one event at the Penn Relays for 20 straight years, winning twice during that stretch and three times overall.

Summing up the team's greatness, *The Inquirer* called the Penn girls simply "the best, by far."

But now, with William Penn temporarily shuttered and the track program disbanded, their legacy is without a home.

Beating the best

Memories of the Penn track team live mostly in the voluminous scrapbooks of legendary former coach Tim Hickey.

It takes a large bookcase, several tables,

and nearly every wall of his home to hold the history Hickey has carefully preserved.

"Other people had families. I had my track girls," he says.

Leafing through the old clippings and photos, Hickey remembers every athlete and every meet.

But the image that generates the biggest reaction is not of his girls at Penn. Instead, it's of their archrivals from powerhouse Brooklyn Tech, crying in defeat following the dramatic finals of the 4 x 800 meter relay at the 1979 Penn Relays.

"Oh, we loved this photo," laughs Hickey. "It was not a friendly competition."

'No such thing' as girls' track

For over a year, Hickey and his runners – Rosie Richardson, Pam Hughes, Valerie Fisher, and Cynthia Colquitt – had been chasing the national scholastic record in the 4 x 800.

In a preliminary heat at the Penn Relays – then, as now, the biggest track meet on the East Coast – Hickey's girls finally broke the record.

Unfortunately, they also finished 3.2 seconds behind Brooklyn Tech.

But in the finals the next day, running in a steady rain, the Penn team broke the new record and beat Brooklyn Tech by more than seven seconds.

"We'd been together so long, and we'd been pointing for the [record] the



Benjamin Herold

"Other people had families. I had my track girls," says former William Penn coach Tim Hickey.

whole year," Hickey says. "To have it come off like that was just fantastic."

Just five years before that record-breaking 1979 relay, girls' track did not exist in the District.

"They didn't think girls could run 100 meters," Hickey remembers. "It was crazy." He knew better.

During a three-year stint as a Peace Corps volunteer, Hickey had coached the Tanzanian women's national track team.

And not long after he arrived in Philadelphia to become a math teacher at Vaux Middle School, he met 14-year old Pat Helms, who would go on to run with the U.S. women's national team while still in junior high.

Hickey wanted to coach at Vaux but was rebuffed.

"I asked about girls' track, and they said there was no such thing," he said. "If you were a girl at that time, the only way you could compete was at the club level."

So Hickey started his own club team, Klub Keystone, which quickly began competing all over the country.

In 1972, Hickey followed Helms and some of his other young standouts from Vaux to William Penn, at the time still an all-girls school serving grades 10-12 in the building on North 15th Street that is now Franklin Learning Center.

It wasn't until 1975, after the federal government enacted Title IX, which bars schools from excluding students from educational programs of any kind on the basis of their sex, that there was

(continued on page 29)

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Remembering

(continued from page 28)

a real citywide championship and Public League schedule of meets.

"That was when girls' sports really exploded on the school level," Hickey says.

"We had some really good club kids, but the [first] really good William Penn bunch ... was the group in '79 that broke the national record."

The best years

It wasn't long until Hickey had his next standout runners.

In 1982, Shawn Nix (nee Moore) started as a freshman at William Penn.

Eventually, Nix would go on to anchor a winning Penn Relays 4 x 400 team in 1985, as well as compete for the U. S. Junior World Team as a hurdler. During Nix's sophomore year, Penn would win the first of what would become 20 consecutive Public League titles.

But first, she had to learn her way around William Penn's new facility at Broad and Master Streets, which had opened in 1975.

"It was a huge, contemporary building – a unique school," remembers Nix. "I knew how to get to one class, nowhere else."

There were other problems to navigate.

Since the move, William Penn had begun admitting boys, added a 9th grade, and became a true neighborhood school – all of which contributed to rising disciplinary issues, Hickey says.

There were also significant issues with the new building.

"When you went behind the walls, it was a complete shambles from the very beginning," remembers Hickey, citing faulty heating, air-conditioning, and electrical systems.

"It was this big modern thing with 24 doors that could not be locked, which turned out to be a disaster," he continues. "You'd have guys who didn't even go to the school run in, beat somebody up, run back out."

For Nix, there were two saving graces at William Penn: the track team and a self-contained Communications magnet program, where Hickey taught.

"We stuck together like a family in that magnet program," Nix says. "And once

track practice started, I was comfortable."

The team didn't have a practice facility but made the most of their surroundings, running sprints on the nearby 15th Street sidewalks. And despite a lack of outside financial support, Hickey always came up with the money to travel to meets and get adequate gear.

As it turned out, a skeptical principal and a fence erected around the school building presented Hickey and his girls with their biggest challenge.

"I had a principal who actually told me I was a failure as a coach because I hadn't taught my girls how to lose!" Hickey says.

"She wouldn't OK us leaving to go anywhere, and the only way out [of school grounds] was to climb over the fence. So for 15 years, [we were] sneaking out and climbing over the fence to go to the Penn Relays."

Hickey retired from teaching in 2003, but he still volunteers as an assistant coach, now with the standout Swenson girls' track team, and he stays in regular contact with many of his runners.

The girls – now women, with careers and families of their own – say it was all worth it.

Rose Richardson, who ran the lead leg on the record-breaking 1979 relay team, briefly attended Delaware State University on a track scholarship and now works as a custodian at a North Philadelphia elementary school.

"Hickey brought out a lot in all of us," she says.

"I was always nervous, but when I ran, I was all right."



Philadelphia Bulletin

Anchor Cynthia Colquitt takes the baton from Valerie Fisher during the 1979 Penn Relays, where William Penn set a scholastic record.

And Shawn Nix, now a physical education teacher and real estate agent in Atlanta, went on to the University of Tennessee, where she won a national championship in the 4 x 800 relay and earned her degree in criminal justice.

She said although she got to travel the world because of track, William Penn will always be home.

"It shaped who I am today," Nix says.

"If there was a place I could go back to in my life, it would be running high school track."

Ben Herold is a freelance writer and the Notebook sports columnist.

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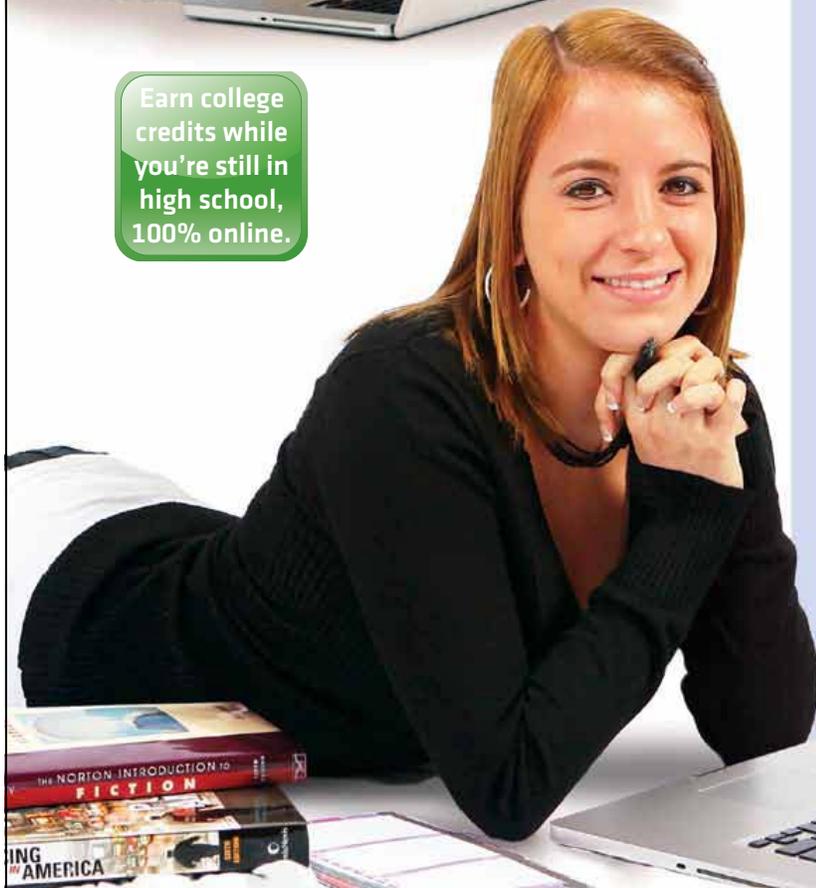


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“Having experienced the closing of the old Childs Elementary building, what’s your advice to other parents at schools facing closure?”

Parent interviews and photos by Benjamin Herold



Judy Walston, 58

“You need to get the community involved. We went to the top [of the District], but Arlene Ackerman would send people [to our meetings] who couldn’t answer our questions. Some of the SRC members didn’t even know what was going on with Childs.”



Stephanie Phusomma, 41

“If there is even a hint of a rumor that your school is going to close, assume that it’s true. It takes time to prepare and adjust to a new building. On the first day of school [after Childs was relocated], nothing was ready, and everyone was confused and lost.”



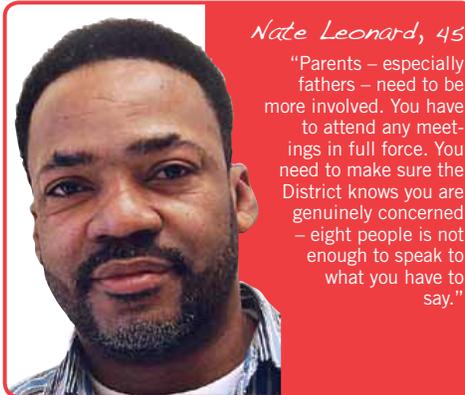
Maria Elena, 32

“Get everything written down and signed. We were not informed of the procedures for how [the transition to a new building] was to be done, and translated documents were not provided for ESL families. Now there is no proof of the promises they made.”



Florine Smith, 39

“Get information on why the school is closing and where it’s going to go. You don’t want to get stuck. I know a lot of people who wanted to transfer their children to a different school, but there wasn’t enough time, because the District rushed the process.”



Nate Leonard, 45

“Parents – especially fathers – need to be more involved. You have to attend any meetings in full force. You need to make sure the District knows you are genuinely concerned – eight people is not enough to speak to what you have to say.”



Kim Smith, 43

“The District needs to be more considerate of kids, families and communities. They didn’t inform us properly, Dr. Ackerman didn’t explain anything to us, and we were given no options whatsoever. Sometimes it’s not the gift, it’s how it’s packaged.”



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Profile of Lauren Jacobs, Notebook member

Helping groups to collaborate and promote educational equity

by Margaret Ernst

Lauren Jacobs, coordinator of the Philadelphia Cross City Campaign for School Reform, a coalition of local organizing and advocacy groups working to improve Philadelphia's schools, is a "hopeful activist."

She has worked for five years facilitating collaboration among Cross City member groups such as Good Schools Pennsylvania, ACTION United, Philadelphia Student Union, and Youth United for Change to strategize about how to achieve greater equity in District schools. Jacobs, 47, says part of what keeps her hopeful about her campaign for better schools is the *Notebook's* commitment to keeping the District transparent and accountable.

"The number one thing that I consider important about the *Notebook* is [its] investigative journalism," Jacobs said. "At a time when everyone is bemoaning the near-death of investigative journalism, the *Notebook's* doing it."

Jacobs recalled an instance when the newspaper had requested data from the District about teacher equity. The District released the data just before an edition of the *Notebook* was to go to press, but despite having little time, the

staff was able to provide a deep analysis of the numbers and print it in a user-friendly fashion in time for that edition, she said.

Jacobs said that data spread was a crucial tool used by the Effective Teaching Campaign, a coalition of more than 20 groups led by Cross City and the Education First Compact that addresses the high teacher turnover in high-poverty neighborhoods and promotes more equitable distribution of teachers.

Impressed with the *Notebook's* analysis of information and wanting to be a part of an organization that helps drive and inform her own work, Jacobs signed on as a member when the *Notebook* launched its membership program two years ago.

"I want my work to be grounded in facts, not myths, [and] the *Notebook* has the ability to take masses of numbers and figure out what the really important data points are," she said.

Jacobs, a lawyer who has practiced in the areas of welfare rights and anti-poverty reform, grew up outside of Boston and worked in Washington, D.C., on federal education policy before moving to Philadelphia in 1995. It was then that she discovered the *Notebook*, making it her "number one



Paul Socolar

Lauren Jacobs, chatting with David Lapp of the Education Law Center, says the *Notebook* informs her work as coordinator of a local education coalition.

source" to support her work.

Jacobs said that she knew about a few of the players in the city's education system, having worked on a vocational education reform project, but reading the *Notebook* became a major part of how she acquainted herself with the issues affecting District schools. She said the paper's website is also a valuable resource that allows her to get a historical perspective on topics through its links to older articles.

Now, Jacobs tells any newcomers

to Philadelphia who are interested in education to "spend a few hours on the *Notebook* website" getting acquainted with issues in the city.

"The *Notebook* keeps a focus on issues not just week to week, but year to year," she said. "It's one of the few ways we have in the city to keep history on the table."

Margaret Ernst is a Bryn Mawr College senior. She was an intern at the Notebook last fall.

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A *Notebook* update

More members, more activity

by Paul Socolar

Public School Notebook's membership ranks grew significantly in 2010, as we added nearly 200 new dues-paying members. Our warmest thanks go out to them for being part of the *Notebook's* community of reader-supporters.

Like much of the news media, the *Notebook* is working hard to develop new and sustainable business models for supporting independent public interest journalism. Financial contributions from a growing membership are a crucial component of our approach to covering our publication costs.

The 2011 membership campaign is underway – we encourage you to join (see box). We are looking to surpass 500 members this year.

As part of its effort to build a community of people committed to educational improvement in Philadelphia, the *Notebook* hosts occasional events for members and others. On December 1, the *Notebook* co-sponsored with the Teacher Action Group a showing of the documentary film "A Community Concern," directed by Susan Zeig. The film highlighted efforts of



Harvey Finkle

Teachers Anissa Weinraub and Timothy Boyle and Youth United for Change organizer Anand Jahi discuss the film "A Community Concern" at a December screening.

organized parent and community groups in three different cities to bring about a positive transformation of their schools. A crowd of 50 attended the screening, hosted by Youth United for Change, and participated in a discussion afterward about community organizing efforts and Philadelphia schools.

To keep posted on upcoming events, including the *Notebook's* June "Turning the Page for Change" celebration, we encourage you to become a member of the *Notebook* today. Basic membership starts at \$30.

Contact Notebook editor Paul Socolar at pauls@thenotebook.org.