

Below is a recap of the April 23 School Board meeting as reported in the Suburban and Wayne Times newspaper. A summary of FLITE, as presented by Chair Tom Colman, is included in the article.

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T/E 's Act 1 ballot recommendation denied

By Jason F. Smith

The Chester County Board of Election's decision to remove part of the Tredyffrin/Easttown School Board's (TESB) phrasing of the May 15 primary-election tax-ballot question concerning Act 1, a prestigious award presented to Conestoga High School (CHS) and much else was discussed at the TESB meeting April 23 at the high school.

"The Board of Elections has notified me that some of the language will be removed [from the primary-ballot question formed by the TESB for Act 1]," said District Solicitor Kenneth Roos. "The board removed the sentence that the tax-study commission and the school board recommend a 'no' vote to changes in the tax structure. The recommendation will be stricken from the ballot question."

Although the Board of Elections has mandated the recommendation generated by the TESB, based on the tax-study commission's recommendations and their own research, many TESB members expressed their opinions that the question should not be rephrased or undergo omissions.

Board president Kevin Mahoney repeated that the board still recommends a "no" vote and other board members recommended that citizens refer to the T/E School District's Web site, www.tesd.net, in order to see how the board has acted in consideration to Act 1 and the tax-study commission's full report.

In addition to recommending to the TESB a vote "no" to any change in the current property-tax structure, the commission proposed a ballot question - as required by Act 1 - asking voters if they would like to adopt a .6-percent personal income tax in order to reduce property tax, which the board favored unanimously.

The phrasing submitted by the TESB was deemed finalized at a TESB special meeting held at Conestoga High School on March 12 as such:

"Do you favor imposing a 0.6-percent personal income tax? There is currently no local income tax. Revenue generated from the tax would be used to reduce taxes on each qualified residential property by an estimated amount of \$450. The T/E Citizen Tax Study Commission and the school board recommend a NO vote. Voters' decision on this question will not affect the school district's ability to receive state gambling funds for property-tax relief."

State government insisted that the ballot question be no more than 75 words. Several TESB members said in March that if more words were permissible, they would have been spent outlining possible fallacies of the proposed tax increase; but the opposite has occurred with the removal of the recommendation of a "no" vote.

Mahoney had mentioned that the rest of the board members told him they will be voting "no" to the proposed tax as far back as early March and comments from the public at several meetings have been largely against Act 1 altogether.

TESB member Pat Wood thanked those who helped to mail flyers about Act 1 to local citizens. "That's the last letter we'll send in regard to the May primary."

In another matter, Conestoga High School was awarded \$1,000 and a Siemens Award for Advanced Placement - awarded to one school per state each year since 1998 - designed to promote excellence in math, science and technology education.

"The awards are given each year to schools in every state across the country who have made significant contributions to AP study by showing the greatest improvement in the number of students taking AP examinations," said Donna DeFreitas of Siemens Building Technologies. "More than 15,000 high schools offer AP courses in math and science but each year the College Board only identifies one school in every state.

"So, if my math is correct, fewer than .003 percent of schools that offer AP courses this year were selected

for the Siemens Award," continued DeFreitas as she presented a check and award to CHS Principal Tim Donovan. "That is truly an astonishing achievement."

DeFreitas said it is important to honor schools like CHS that "are educating the next generation of scientists that may advance tomorrow's technology," and she quoted Henry Ford: "The competitiveness of a country doesn't start in a factory or research lab, rather in the classroom."

More than 300,000 students take AP math and science exams every year in the U.S. The highest scorers on the most recent math and science AP exams for Pennsylvania are a boy from West Chester and a girl from Pittsburgh.

Foundation for Learning in Tredyffrin/Easttown (FLITE) Chairman Dr. Tom Coleman explained to the public what FLITE is, what has happened so far, and its loose agenda for 2008-09.

"FLITE is an education foundation that was started in the spring of 2006 to support excellence in the T/E schools, assist students who need extra help and to help students take full advantage to all of the programs and what is offered," said Coleman, who mentioned that FLITE is independent of the school district, although the foundation works closely with the district. "FLITE funds programs, not runs them.

"FLITE's funding comes primarily through donations from area residents and local businesses," continued Coleman. "Many teachers and support staff are taking monthly reductions from their paychecks to donate. We are a United Fund/United Way program."

Coleman said that the foundation has a 28-member board of trustees compiled of T/E residents and has attracted many volunteers for its first year.

"We've raised over \$100,000 so far and helped over 70 students who just needed a boost," said Coleman.

"We have a partnership with Valley Forge Middle School called Homework Oasis consisting of 19 students who now receive considerable tutoring. "I have their grades. Some had a 71 percent in math in the first marking period and a 92 percent in math in the third marking period. "We also formed the T/E Homework Club, an elementary after-school club that has formed in each of the elementary schools."

Some of the foundation's second-year objectives are to renew this year's programs, encourage and improve new programs, enroll students in Delaware Valley Friends School Summer Reading Program and support a preschool program.

In addition to broadening community awareness of FLITE and programs available through the school district, the foundation will be working to organize an alumni initiative for the CHS.

"[Superintendent Dr.] Dan Waters has been nothing short of awesome [for the administrative support]," thanked Coleman, who, in turn was thanked by board member Liane Davis for his efforts with FLITE.

"FLITE has almost no expenses," said Coleman. "Everything we do has been possible through donations of the people in this community."

"This Saturday at Valley Forge Middle School, they're having a car wash from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. to raise money for FLITE," said board member Sandra Gorman.

For more information or to make a tax-deductible donation call 610-240-1860 or check out www.flite-pa.org or info@flite-pa.org.

Current federal legislation is pushing the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), announced Waters, referring to the process under "Outside Impacts on T/E."

Waters and Dr. Marie Slobojan, director of instruction, staff development and planning, agreed that the legislation would be "at least as stringent as current law" and would make the district have to look at national and state standards to attain satisfactory Annual Year Performance (AYP). They mentioned that the National Education Association opposes the ways NCLB will define successful teachers and students.

The methods that will be used to assess how students improve or worsen yearly academically does not sit well with Waters, who said it is not a reasonable standard to expect 100 percent of the students to have a 100-percent pass ratio eventually in order to indicate an improvement in AYP. "It is not a reasonable standard.

"At some point the district will be put on a warning list because the standards are not realistic. We believe it is the voice and passion of the public to have more freedom in public education."

Waters encouraged the public to research NCLB and to "convey to their legislators their positions regarding the reauthorization."

"An education community once reviewed sample questions that were deemed incredibly difficult at all grade

levels," said board member Dr. Peter Motel. "Gone are the days of 40 desks in rows where all of the students were taught the same way. It moves us back to an era when school wasn't fun.

"We need to keep kids motivated and education fun. That's what we're about in the TESD. I offer that it's not the bureaucrats at the state and federal levels that should define quality education."

"I believe that the law will be authorized January of 2008," said Slobojan. "We request that as many members of the community contact their legislators."

The district also announced the proposed final 2007-08 school-year budget, totaling \$94,404,835 in revenue, \$2,091,923 in fund-balance transfers and \$96,496,758 for tentative-basis appropriations.