

SOUDERTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT  
760 Lower Road  
Souderton, PA 18964

**CONTEMPLATED CLOSURE OF LOWER SALFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
**PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**

The Souderton Area Board of School Directors held a **Public Hearing** on Tuesday, November 27, 2012 for the purpose of public comment regarding the contemplated closure of Lower Salford Elementary School. The hearing was held in the Souderton Area High School Auditorium, 625 Lower Road, Souderton, PA. The hearing was called to order at 6:34 PM by Board President Bernard S. Currie, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. William Stone called the roll, and Board members present were:

PRESENT:	Jill S. Basile	Matt Holliday
	Nicholas A. Braccio	Scott C. Jelinski
	William J. Brong	Ken R. Keith
	Bernard S. Currie	Thomas A. Kwiatkowski
		Donna M. Scheuren

SOLICITOR: Jeffrey Sultanik, Esq.

Also present at the hearing were: Frank Ball, Maryellen Brousseau, Henry Franz, Frank Gallagher, Dr. Christopher Hey, Dr. Frederick Johnson, Tim Roberts, Walt Salevsky, William Stone (Secretary), reporters from ***The Reporter***, ***Intelligencer***, and ***Arrowhead*** newspapers, WNPV Radio, and community members.

**EXPLANATION OF NEED AND PURPOSE OF HEARING**  
Bernard S. Currie, Board President

Mr. Currie explained the purpose of the public hearing and the Board's compliance with various sections of the Public School Code. He also reviewed actions taken by the Board to date, including passing a resolution to authorize the hearing on September 27, 2012 and sending notification letters to the Montgomery County and Lower Salford Township Planning Commissions.

Mr. Currie stated that the hearing is required by Section 780 of the Public School Code. The hearing is designed to determine whether or not the District should close the Lower Salford Elementary School. This hearing is **not** about determining where students who are assigned to the Lower Salford Elementary School attendance area will attend school in future years. The decision on District attendance areas is the subject matter that is being led by the Task Force established by the District.

**SUBMISSION OF ITEMS INTO THE RECORD**  
Jeffrey T. Sultanik, Esquire

Mr. Sultanik entered the following exhibits into the official record of the public hearing:

**Exhibit A** – Explanation of the need for a public hearing.

**Exhibit B** – Report of the President on procedures for public comment.

SUBMISSION OF ITEMS INTO THE RECORD (CONTINUED)

**Exhibit C** – Certified resolution adopted by the Board of School Directors at its September 27, 2012 meeting, authorizing the various steps involved in the contemplated closure of Lower Salford Elementary School.

**Exhibit D** – Proofs of publication for the notices for the hearing, which appeared in *The Reporter* on November 5, 2012 and the *Montgomery County Law Reporter* on November 8, 2012.

**Exhibit E** – Copy of Notification letter sent to both the Montgomery County and Lower Salford Township Planning Commissions on October 22, 2012.

**Exhibit F** – Copy of e-mail with letter sent to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, School Services Unit, providing notification of the contemplated closure of Lower Salford Elementary School.

**Exhibit G** – Administration's statement regarding the contemplated closure of Lower Salford Elementary School.

**Exhibit H** – Summary of data for contemplated closure.

**Exhibit I** – Administrative presentations to Board Committees.

ADMINISTRATION'S STATEMENT REGARDING THE CONTEMPLATED CLOSURE  
OF LOWER SALFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Dr. Frederick C. Johnson, Superintendent

Dr. Johnson reviewed that information had already been presented to the Board and public at past Board committee meetings and Board action meetings. He talked about the enrollment projections which show a declining enrollment and decrease in kindergarten registrations. These findings are projected to continue by the Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL) and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). The elementary enrollment projections from both PEL and PDE both show a pupil decrease of 13% over the next eight (8) years.

Dr. Johnson shared that the administration has reviewed and analyzed prior PEL studies, discussed updated development trends with municipality officials, reviewed various Montgomery County Planning Commission reports, and have contemplated the "what if" scenarios. The administration has also extensively reviewed the results of the facilities study.

The results of the facilities study showed:

1. There are unused and under-utilized classrooms in the current seven-school configuration.
2. Lower Salford Elementary's last renovation was in 1962, and it lacks modern upgrades.
3. Lower Salford is unable to accommodate individuals with disabilities without significant renovation or undue financial hardship on the taxpayers.

ADMINISTRATION'S STATEMENT REGARDING THE CONTEMPLATED CLOSURE  
OF LOWER SALFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (CONTINUED)

Dr. Johnson then reviewed building capacity numbers as seen by PDE standards and District standards. He shared information on the number of unused and under-utilized classrooms in each of the elementary school buildings.

Dr. Johnson reviewed the financial implications of the closure.

Finally, Dr. Johnson presented the school closure options that were considered.

PROCEDURES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT AT  
LOWER SALFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLOSURE HEARING

Mr. Currie said that the District faces declining enrollments and a financial bind that have been disclosed and continues to need serious consideration in an attempt to save the programs that are necessary.

Mr. Currie noted that a court stenographer was present, as required by law, to take down testimonial comments. He explained to the public what information was needed from each speaker for public record.

Mr. Currie explained the guidelines to be followed by the public for the comment portion of the hearing. The public was not to ask questions about redistricting as this issue will be subject to discussion by the Task Force and Assistant Superintendent, Frank Gallagher, during future meetings. Mr. Currie explained the makeup of the Task Force and the focus of their work. He also discouraged "hear-say" comments and reserved the right to remove them from the record.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chris Canavan, Lower Salford Township: He asked the Board why a task force was not formed earlier in the decision/recommendation process. Based on the township planning data and other information that Mr. Canavan has access to, he believes that Lower Salford is not the correct school to close. He does not agree with the decision to close Lower Salford. He asked the Board if another elementary school would close in later years due to another decrease in enrollment.

Mr. Currie responded to some of Mr. Canavan's comments regarding the use of a task force earlier in the process. The Board is charged with the responsibility of making decisions for all taxpayers. He reiterated that the administration always shares reports to the Board during public meetings.

Michael Mills, of Harleysville: Commented on the decision to close Lower Salford Elementary. He indicated that money can be raised in other ways to help with funding programs that may be scheduled to be cut. He asked the Board to re-examine their decision to close Lower Salford Elementary.

Ami Goodman, of Harleysville: Informed the Board that after researching Board committee meeting minutes, she could not find any mention that a school was to be closed. Mrs. Goodman does not agree that the students will be fine with the transition. She stated that residents have asked for input from the township and county regarding results of traffic, water, and sewer studies.

PUBLIC COMMENT (CONTINUED)

Stephanie Heart, Lower Salford Township: Mrs. Heart indicated that she had requested a copy of the Facility Study but was told that the administration could not produce the document that she asked for. Mrs. Heart asked the Board to make sure that the water and septic system capacities are examined before a final decision is made. There are other alternatives that can be made in order to give the Board more time on this important decision.

Mr. Currie responded to the concerns about the water and septic systems at Vernfield Elementary and Salford Hills Elementary. All systems are monitored frequently and there have been no concerns.

Robin McLaughlin, Lower Salford Township: Commented on the fact that the Board's decision to close was due to Lower Salford being an outdated building. She referred to a document that she had previously brought to the Board's attention a few months ago, where grants were available to fund renovations. Mrs. McLaughlin asked if the Board or administration had reviewed the information in the booklet.

Mr. Currie responded to Mrs. McLaughlin's reference to renovations at Lower Salford and ADA compliance. The administration considered the cost involved in renovating Lower Salford, but the initial problem would not be solved.

David Goodman, of Harleysville: Mr. Goodman is a member of the Task Force and commented on the process involved in redistricting. He suggested changing the process so the Task Force could make a recommendation prior to the Board's decision.

Mr. Gallagher responded that the decision to redistrict all schools is not likely for all six schools. EMC and West Board Elementary Schools will not be included in the redistricting.

Anne McCausland, Lower Salford Township: Discussed hear-say comments regarding the closure decision and the water and septic systems at Salford Hills Elementary.

Andrea Farina, of Harleysville: Mrs. Farina indicated that she did not receive the information she requested through the Right to Know Act.

Mr. Currie responded to Mrs. Farina's specific Right to Know request.

Mr. Barry Bohmueller, of Harleysville: He commented that the Board should make individual decisions on the closure. He asked the Board to delay the decision and consider what will happen when the need arises for another elementary school in the future.

Larry Dick, Lower Salford Township: Commented on the community losing their cornerstone. He asked the Board to make sure they have all the data before making their final decision.

There were no comments from the Board members.

Mr. Currie adjourned the hearing at 8:08 PM.

Realizing that additional community members had signed up to speak, Mr. Currie reopened the hearing at 8:09 PM.

PUBLIC COMMENT (CONTINUED)

Dave Brewer, of Harleysville: Mr. Brewer mentioned that he has asked the County for advice resulting from a traffic study. He asked the Board to take a step back and look at all of the data.

Nate Clemmer, of Harleysville: Mr. Clemmer was concerned about the enrollment data. The PEL data is district wide information and not data specific to Lower Salford. He asked if personnel adjustments could be made in the short term to allow more time for the decision.

Mr. Currie responded that the Board has looked at Mr. Clemmer's suggestions and always considers adjustments.

Mr. Currie re-adjourned the meeting at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully,

William R. Stone, Jr.  
Board Secretary