

February 5, 2010

Dear GMRS Superintendent and School Board,

There were several issues discussed at the recent GMRS Board meeting of January 19, 2010 that the Liberty Township Committee would ask the school board to remedy or address, they are:

- The school Board voted in a 6 to 2 majority to reorganize the Liberty and Central schools. We applaud the responsible action taken by Mr. Joe Mahal and Mr. Bill Vonderhaar in voting against this reorganization. As stated in our previous letter to the school board dated January 19, 2010, the Liberty Township Committee strongly objects to this decision and asks the school board to rescind their decision for reasons previously stated.

The school board president stated that based on surveys taken by the school board that the majority of parents were in favor of the reorganization of the schools. Judging by the comments of the parents and residents at the three information meetings held by the school board to discuss the issue, it was evident that the majority of residents object to this plan. At this meeting a parent asked that the school board distribute copies of each individual survey response so that both the structure of the questions and the actual responses can be reviewed by the public. Liberty Township Committee supports this request, the school board should distribute the survey responses.

- The decision to reorganize the schools has wide sweeping impact to both communities and is not a decision that should be made by an 8 member school board. Rather, this issue should be put up for a public vote in the form of a referendum during the next election. The support of the parents for this reorganization will be demonstrated by their vote. This was suggested at several of the informational meetings held by the school board. Liberty Township Committee asks that GMRS board suspend their decision and put the reorganization on the ballot for a public vote.
- The school board brought forward the issue of increasing the advanced tuition paid to Hackettstown High School for 9-12 student enrolment. The school board discussed increasing the overpayment to Hackettstown by approximately 10 students. This means that taxpayers would be paying tuition to Hackettstown for 10 students that do not exist. Further, this is in addition to the current overpayment practices of the school board which has averaged 10 student overpayments annually for the last several years, bringing the total tuition overpayment to Hackettstown to approximately 20 students; these are students that do not exist!!

At an approximate per student tuition payment of \$12,000 each, this means that GMRS district will overpay Hackettstown High School approximately \$240,000 annually. This is

money the taxpayers of Liberty Township can ill afford.

The superintendent indicated that there is a significant budget surplus this year that he would like to use to fund after school programs. At the same time, a parent stated to the school board that her child was not able to fully participate in Art class because there was no construction paper and markers for the children to draw on/with. When questioned, the superintendent indicated that he put a freeze on school supply purchases this year as a means to keep the budget in line.

It is our position that if there is a surplus in the school budget and student learning supplies are lacking, this surplus should be directed to replenish classroom supplies for the regularly scheduled classroom programs. Further, once school supplies are replenished the balance of the surplus should be applied toward reducing the annual school budget; taxpayers should not be paying for after school programs. After school programs are optional and should be paid for by the parents of the child.

The school board discussed line item transfers performed by the school superintendent and business administrator without specific prior knowledge/approval/vote of the school board membership. The school board president stated that this was standard practice at all school boards and was perfectly acceptable. Liberty Township Committee strongly disagrees with the comments and position of the school board president, and we further disagree with the actions of the superintendent and business administrator relative to line item transfers, as this is not standard practice.

School board members are elected to serve as the watchdogs for the taxpayers of the monies allocated to the school for the education of our children. In Liberty Township, between 60-70% of the taxes paid by an individual homeowner are school taxes. The school board should be notified of a financial need to transfer funds from one budget line item to another and should be approving or rejecting these transfers as they see fit in an effort to manage the budget of the school. This is a principal function of the school board and its membership. Abdicating this responsibility of its membership relegates the school board meetings to nothing more than a social event for its members.

School board members, please take back control of the school budget!

In consideration of the above stated issues, the Liberty Township Committee respectfully requests that you address each of these items; preferably in the manner in which we suggested.

Respectfully,

John Fisher
Mayor

Daniel Grover
Committeeman

Cc: Bret Schundler, NJ Commission of Education
Kevin Brennan, Warren County Superintendent of Schools

Independence Mayor and Committee

Connie Collier, Liberty PTO

Angie Dogerty, Central School PTO

Kim Reitmeyer, Middle School PATHS