

## A Message from PTSD PTA Concerning the High School Facility

Last year the school district circulated a survey concerning the possible renovation of Peters Township High School. The survey described the current needs of our students only in the most basic and general terms, with few details concerning the problems faced each day at the high school. Only 2 questions were asked:

1. Would community members support a high school renovation?
2. Would community members consider having their taxes increased to accommodate a \$53 million renovation?

No surprise, the overwhelming response was NO. The PTSD PTA believes it needs to be communicated to the community **WHY** the high school cannot adequately meet our current and future needs.

With this oversight in mind, the PTA Area Council decided to communicate our concerns regarding the high school facility to the community with the goal of gathering the support of concerned stakeholders in a petition to present to the board. The on-line petition requests that the School Board reconsider the possibility of new construction or a building renovation. To sign the petition, go to:

[www.ipetitions.com/petition/improvepths/](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/improvepths/)

If you have any questions or would like to make additional suggestions, please contact one of your building PTA representatives.

### **Building Issues**

*After talking with community stakeholders, administrators, and staff, we have identified several issues at the high school that need to be addressed. The following list is not meant to be a comprehensive outline of all issues. A thorough building evaluation would need to be done for that. Our major concerns are those issues impacting student **safety, security and curriculum**. Outlined below are just a few. Maintenance issues are highlighted as they illustrate the age of the facility, the costs to run old, inefficient equipment, and the need for improvements.*

#### **Safety and Security**

*The layout of our current building does not address safety and security issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

- Main entrances need to be designed to provide easy access to the main office, counseling office, and other highly traveled areas, while keeping the classroom area secure. Large event spaces, such as the theater, need to be shifted out of the center of the building so that the main portion of the facility can be secured during large events.

- The current front entrance requires students to use the main lobby when changing classes or going to lunch. This main lobby is covered essentially by a large glass wall that provides neither screening nor protection for our students from anyone outside watching them or wishing to do them harm.
- Overcrowding in the hallways and stairwells during class change is a safety concern. Students have complained of being accidentally knocked into lockers or whacked by backpacks as they move through the hallways.
- The poorly designed parking lot does not allow sufficient space for buses in front of the building. As a result, the line of buses backs up onto McMurray Road during morning arrival, not only causing traffic congestion, but also impeding emergency vehicle access at the start and end of school.

### **Lack of Space Impacts Curriculum and Programs**

- The building capacity based on PDE guidelines is 1514 students. Current enrollment is 1496 students. Enrollment projection data obtained from the district show that we will exceed capacity in the year 2015 with 1525 students.
- The gymnasium seating capacity is 1050. Not all students can participate in assemblies and pep rallies.
- No large open areas to accommodate group projects or instruction.
- The cafeteria is undersized – lunch periods must start at 9:45 am and finish at 1:00 pm.
- Classroom space is restricted which impacts curriculum and program offerings. Students sometimes are forced to decide between taking lunch or a class they want.
- The auditorium facility is outdated and placed in an awkward location in the middle of the building. The lighting and sound equipment dates back to 1968 and will not meet future federal guidelines for energy. The original 1968 wiring is a safety concern.
- With a seating capacity of only 700, the auditorium cannot accommodate the entire student body at once. The small stage and lack of an orchestra pit restrict our ability to rent this space.
- Some areas that were previously used as storage space are now used as classrooms. These spaces are too small to accommodate a typical class size and do not afford our children access to the quality educational experience that we expect.
- Some Special Ed instructional spaces are shared with staff offices due to lack of space. That sharing is unfair to both the special education students who deserve a classroom that meets their needs and to the office staff who have their own jobs to do in support of the educational mission of the building.
- Limited classroom space restricts course offerings. Parents have shared concerns that their children often do not receive requested electives.
- Inadequate lab space forces some science labs to use a cart with limited lab supplies and equipment, restricting the number of lab science classes offered.
- The lack of a high school life-skills classroom will impact our ability to provide adequate special education services for life-skills students.
- The lack of windows in many classrooms causes security and safety issues. With no windows, rooms may have only one exit in case of an emergency. If a fire blocked the

door, the students would be trapped. Additionally, during the recent power outage and generator failure, too many rooms full of adolescents were pitch black for extended periods of time.

### **Facility Maintenance Issues**

- The boiler in the gym area is the original one installed in 1969 and broke this year. As a result, our swim team and community recreation groups were forced to rent other facilities.
- The phone system is consistently problematic, preventing reliable access to district personnel by parents during the school day.
- Large group study halls are held in the auxiliary auditorium due to lack of space. The lighting is poor and students are forced to work off their laps as there are no desks or table tops.
- All windows are the original ones installed in 1969 and should be replaced. None are energy efficient resulting in higher energy bills as heated or air-conditioned air escapes through the windows. In addition, they also leak causing water damage.
- The roof was only replaced on one-third of the building. The other two-thirds of the roof leaks, causing water damage and the constant need to replace ceiling tiles to cover up the problem.
- Ventilation in the gym area is not working.
- Neither the gym nor the hallways have air conditioning.
- Light poles in the parking lot are rusting.

### **Position Statement – School Facilities**

The National PTA believes the school environment significantly impacts students' academic achievement and have supported measures ensuring that all children receive the chance for a quality education in facilities that are safe, well-equipped, and sufficiently maintained. Our current high school facility would be hard-pressed to satisfy all three of those descriptors.

In addition, the National PTA:

- recognizes that the facility itself can stimulate learning and help to incorporate innovative curriculum and methods into the classroom. The National PTA urges schools to create adaptable classrooms which foster the use of current technology and accommodate various teaching and learning styles;
- affirms that adequate school facilities are not only crucial to the success of our nation's public schools, but they are also a reflection of and resource for the communities in which they are located. Since school facilities are a capital asset constituting a large investment of public funds, the National PTA desires that all school facilities encourage community utilization and involvement;

- stresses the importance of open communication within school districts. The National PTA encourages administrators, educators, parents, students, and community leaders to work together with their architects to design new or renovated facilities that are tailored to their specific needs.