



As I See It: These candidates will make the tough decisions

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By Rachel Ebby-Rosin

The Radnor Township School Board of Directors faces a monumental task this year: cutting \$3 million from a \$75-million budget for the 2010-2011 school year. Given that a large percentage of the budget is already locked up in contractual obligations such as teacher salaries and debt service from the construction of our new schools, school-board members will be faced with extremely difficult choices as to what to cut and what to maintain while formulating this upcoming budget. In light of this potential fiscal crisis, I urge voters to join me in supporting the Democratic candidates, Rob Armstrong, Lydia Solomon, Doug Blazey and Brucie Rapoport, in their bid for election to the Radnor Township School Board of Directors.

Rob, Lydia, Doug and Brucie, known as the slate "Leaders for Radnor Excellence," have suggested a variety of both practical and innovative strategies to help eliminate waste in the RTSD budget without placing the burden of these decisions on the backs of our students. Most important, Rob, Lydia, Doug and Brucie have vowed to maintain current class-size caps as defined by the Radnor Township School District (RTSD). As a parent, a former teacher and a Ph.D. in education policy I cannot emphasize enough the importance of this commitment to current class-size caps. In the early primary grades, the 21:1 ratio ensures that students will get the attention and assistance they need as they master the fundamentals of reading. It also contributes to an environment where younger students feel safe and well cared for as they transition from the intimacy of a pre-school environment to the hustle and bustle of a K-5 elementary school. In the older primary grades, as well as in middle school and high school, the current caps enable teachers to facilitate more meaningful classroom discussions where every student can have a voice and where dissenting opinions can be examined and explored.

For all grade levels, current class-size caps in RTSD enable teachers to provide differentiated instruction, providing extra enrichment to students who need more challenging material and remediation to those students who might otherwise fall through the cracks. RTSD's existing limits on class size also make it possible for teachers to provide more creative assignments and employ more innovative teaching methods than they could with a larger teacher/pupil ratio. If the cap on class sizes were to increase, it would likely create additional burdens on teachers in terms

of classroom management and classroom administrative duties, thereby undermining their ability to serve as effective educators.

In short, while raising the student/teacher ratio would be an easy way to save money in a time of financial crisis, the cost to our students in terms of their educational experience would be unacceptable. For those Radnor residents who do not have children in the public schools, the result would be equally deleterious. As University of Pennsylvania professors Susan Black and Fernando Ferreira have demonstrated in separate research studies, there is a clear and undeniable link between school quality and property values. The Democratic school-board slate, "Leaders for Radnor Excellence," is committed to keeping Radnor schools strong and thereby preserving Radnor Township's outstanding reputation as a place to live.

I also urge voters to support Rob, Lydia, Brucie and Doug because they are committed to a decision-making process that is inclusive and transparent. If elected, these candidates will do their best to make sure that all voices are heard, all concerns are considered and that their own decisions are fully open to public scrutiny. Having strong schools is essential not only for maintaining high property values but for maintaining the future of our community. We cannot succeed as a community without highly educated graduates who can engage in critical thinking and complex decision-making. Rob Armstrong, Lydia Solomon, Brucie Rapoport and Doug Blazey are the candidates best equipped to make the tough decisions now to ensure the best tomorrow for all of us.

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