

Our 2009 Plan to Address the Issues and New Challenges Facing the Bensalem Township School District

PAST: The School Board followed the lead of the controlling political party. All nine members belonged to the Republican Party.

PRESENT: The election of four Democratic School Board Members has assured diversity and representation of the entire Bensalem Community. We function as an independent entity serving the best interests of the community.

FUTURE: We will continue to challenge the Republican majority to join us in confronting problems as opportunities to improve the Bensalem School District and to do what's best for students, not what's politically convenient.

PAST: The all Republican Bensalem School Board approved a poorly implemented plan for the Integrated Math Program (IMP). It closed Armstrong Middle School without adequate impact assessments which then caused overcrowding at some elementary schools and transportation problems. It adopted Block Scheduling which has failed to meet the needs of all students.

PRESENT: We have endorsed ongoing assessment of all curricular areas. We have encouraged community participation in the review of major proposals affecting the district (focus groups for the hiring of the Superintendent, the Strategic Plan, Boundary Realignment, Full Day Kindergarten, World Language, Class Size, Inclusion, and Assessment). We welcome parental and community input at meetings and via the district's website. School Board meetings and other cable broadcasts provide a forum by which we share information with residents about proposed changes and their impact.

FUTURE: We will support a comprehensive evaluation of Block Scheduling and of ways to best meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of our sixth grade students. We will continue to strive to provide instruction that is rigorous and appropriately challenges all students enrolled in Bensalem School District and Bucks County Technical High School, so that our children are educated for success in the 21st Century, not just for taking tests.

PAST: The all Republican School Board made short-term changes that lacked long-term fiscal stability. As examples, the Board failed to adequately plan the move of the sixth grade classes back to the elementary schools; no cost-saving analysis was presented to the public.

PRESENT: We continue to insist that plans are thoroughly researched before decisions are made. Comprehensive needs assessments have been used as a basis for making long-range district-wide plans. We have worked to ensure that existing facilities be maximized for student benefit and are safe, secure environments.

FUTURE: We will look for ways to cut expenses without cutting the quality of the education our students receive. The restrictions of Act 1 demand we make intelligent, thoughtful decisions to ensure the long-term financial health of the district in these uncertain economic times.

PAST: The all Republican School Board made secretive decisions. As examples: the Board refused to explain its flip-flopping decision on renewing the former Superintendent's contract. In February 2004 the Board stated that it would not move sixth grade back to the elementary schools without long-range studies; one month later, the board voted to make the change without public explanation or community involvement.

PRESENT: We address concerns involving controversial actions. Prior to implementing major changes, long-range studies using community input have been conducted. We included focus groups of staff and parents when hiring the Superintendent and have implemented regular evaluations of his performance. We will continue to foster an atmosphere of open, honest communication with parents, staff, and community so that problems can be resolved together. We believe personnel decisions should be made on qualifications not connections.

FUTURE: We will continue to openly discuss our decisions, welcome constructive ideas, and solicit community volunteers as resources. Our goal is qualified, culturally diverse candidates to fill staff vacancies. The Democratic School Board members will never support awarding district jobs to political cronies and contributors.

PAST: The Bensalem School district provided ONLY half-day kindergarten.

PRESENT: We support the Superintendent's fiscally responsible plan to phase in the implementation of full-day kindergarten, as a proven approach to prepare children for their new learning experiences in the Bensalem school system. Full-day kindergarten provides a strong educational foundation, especially for "at risk" children, that will help reduce the need for future remediation and improve test scores.

FUTURE: The performance of students in full-day kindergarten must be assessed and used to make long-term decisions about the best way to use our resources to meet the needs of our children.

PAST: Not all School Board members were actively involved in school-sponsored activities. This lack of involvement represented a major disconnect between the Board, the District, and the taxpayers who support the school system.

PRESENT: The Democratic School Board members attend school functions, concerts, sporting events, and meetings and we are active participants in district committees. Our experiences and background allow us to make positive contributions.

FUTURE: Because we believe our students and staff deserve respect and recognition for their efforts, we will attend as many activities as possible. In addition, we believe that the interactions keep us informed and thus able to make better decisions.

PAST: The School District maintained a lackluster website. It failed to utilize existing technologies to improve communications between the schools, its teachers and students, and the local community.

PRESENT: We supported the development of a professionally designed website. Our vibrant website has indeed allowed the School Board, administrators, and teachers to better communicate with parents and other residents. Parents can sign up for the electronic emergency notification system.

FUTURE: We will support using 21st Century technology to expand communication.

PAST: Communications between parents, school officials, and the School Board for discussing concerns and resolutions were insufficient. Regularly scheduled School Board meetings did not allow an adequate forum to listen to community issues that involved the school system.

PRESENT: We have helped create a climate that values open communication. We support the right of parents and other members of the community to voice concerns to the School Board when they have not been satisfactorily addressed by the School District.

FUTURE: As knowledgeable, committed members of the School Board, we offer Bensalem residents a genuine opportunity for:

- Leadership,
- Independent, rational thinking,
- Integrity, and
- Fiscal responsibility.

We have demonstrated our belief that Board members must be knowledgeable and involved in the day-to-day operation of the school district. And, we will continue to work collaboratively with school staff—without micromanaging—as they strive to fulfill the District’s mission statement, to make Bensalem the “premier educational institution in Bucks County” by providing "a first class education for the 'whole child' that challenges and supports each student to discover a passion for learning while designing and achieving a personal vision of success."