

Communication Log 2014-15

Initiated By	Date	Responded By	Date	Topic	Phone	Letter	Email	Meeting	Other
Pat Zach	7/1/14	Emerson Smith	7/1/14	Full-Day Kindergarten Tuition			x		
Barb Buck	7/1/14	N/A		Full-Day Kindergarten Tuition			x		
Dave Buck	7/1/14	Sarah Riss	7/1/14	June Update			x		
Chris Wilhelm	10/13/14	Emerson Smith, Sarah Riss		property issues (ongoing conversation from July 2014)			x		
Dave Buck	10/24/14	Sarah Riss	10/24/14	Creative Thinking Seminars			x		
Jonathan Browne	11/7/14	N/A		Property Assemblage		x			
Pat Zach	11/12/14	Amy Clendennen	11/12-11/13	Proposals at BOE meetings			x		
Chrissie Stewart	11/13/14	Steve Loher	11/13-11/14	BOE Meeting question			x		
Chrissie Stewart	11/14/14	Sarah Riss	11/17/14	Bond Questions			x		
Dave Buck	11/15/14	Sarah Riss	11/17/14	Retreat Feedback			x		
Jean Dugan	11/16/14	Diane Moore	11/16/14	Moss Field timetable			x		
Dave Buck	11/20/14	Sarah Riss	11/20/14	Do High School Rankings Really Matter?			x		
Dave Buck	12/3/14	Sarah Riss	12/3/14	Creative Kids Chaos Day			x		
Sara Howard	12/4/14	Sarah Riss, Emerson Smith	12/4/14	HS ECHO survey distribution			x		
Anothony Stricker	12/6/14	Sarah Riss	12/8/14	Tax Levy/Bond Issue			x		
Bob Sherwood	12/8/14	David Addison	12/12/14	Tax Increase			x		
		Amy Clendennen	12/12/14	Tax Increase			x		
		Emerson Smith	12/12/14	Tax Increase			x		
		Emerson Smith	12/14/14	Tax Increase			x		
Tracy Smith Clyburn/CS parents	12/17/14	Sarah Riss	12/17/14	Letter from CS parents about grandfathering CS students			x		
Dave Buck	1/16/15	Sarah Riss	12/20/15	40 Acres Master Plan Status			x		
Dave Buck	1/27/15	Sarah Riss	1/27/15	Four Key Words to Improve WGSD			x		
Dave Buck	2/24/15	Sarah Riss	2/24/15	Propositions S & W	x		x		
Max Wolfrum	3/11/15	Sarah Riss		Props S & W		x			
Dave Buck	3/19/15	Sarah Riss	3/19/15	Spend Wisely or Educate Beautifully?			x		
Dave Buck	3/23/15	Sarah Riss	3/23/15	There is Nothing More Powerful Than an Idea Whose Time Has Come			x		
Dave Buck	4/1/15	Sarah Riss	4/1/15	Online Q&A session feedback			x		
Dave Buck	4/8/15	Sarah Riss	4/8/15	My Favorite Quotes for Times Like These			x		
Dave Buck	4/10/15	Sarah Riss	4/10/15	Reimaging WGSD's Window of Opportunity			x		
Drew Gillow	4/8/15	Diane, Emerson	4/11, 4/13	Next steps for WGSD			x		

March 11, 2015

Dr Sarah Riss, Superintendent
Webster Groves School District
400 E Lockwood Avenue
Webster Groves, MO 63119

Dear Dr Riss:

Having read the committee reports and information on the District's web site and attended the informational meeting at Hixson, I want to follow up with several opinions regarding Propositions S and W.

The information presented at Hixson was straightforward, detailed, informative and convincing. While none of us likes the idea of having the highest tax levy in the County, I strongly support the Prop S operating levy proposal. So long as we remain a moderately upscale residential community with an abundance of tax-exempt property, very little commercial property and no possibility of significant growth in the commercial property tax base, and no help from the State, we are bound to that longstanding five-year cycle of operating levy increases if we are to maintain the same level of educational quality. It's painful but necessary and a large majority of our remarkably supportive voters seem to understand the circumstances.

Not offering free all-day kindergarten has been a long-time embarrassment when districts much less affluent than Webster have done so for years. As superintendent in the last century, I wanted very much to implement a full day free program, but it was always the same old dilemma—money, money, money—the lack of it. Anyway, if it can happen now, it would be a definite upgrade in the District's image and a milestone victory.

With regard to Prop W, there are obviously some bond issue items that need to be addressed in the near future. I do believe strongly, however, that the Facilities Committee's Plan B would much more appropriately address the existing needs and would serve far better than Plan A which Prop W proposes to implement.

The crux of Plan A and Prop W, converting Steger to an elementary school, is based on unrealistic assumptions regarding the availability of students to attend Steger. Making Steger a sixth grade center some thirty years ago was a numbers and capacity decision, not a programmatic one. In most people's opinion it fortunately also turned out to be a good decision educationally, serving as a logical and effective transition experience between elementary and middle/junior high. For many years it has been an exceptional school.

While your presentation includes standard and often accepted advantages for a 6-8 middle school, I suspect that it would be difficult to document its being significantly more advantageous than the present arrangement. Our observation when the Sixth Grade Center was created was that most 6-8 middle schools made as much effort as practical to separate sixth grade from seventh and eighth when they were at the same site. Our expedient solution of a sixth grade center achieved that goal very efficiently. While the 6-8 structure is the most common one; every conceivable combination also exists—5-6 centers, 5-8, K-8, etc. The practical issue, however, is that I can't see any significant changes in the location of students since the 6th grade center was established that would negate the unworkable arrangement of making Steger an elementary school.

More important than numbers, however, the driving and controlling condition regarding boundaries, which cannot be changed or disregarded, is the demographic reality of the District. More than forty years ago the District courageously committed to integrating all its schools as evenly as practical. Simply looking at a map of the district showing the elementary school boundaries (which most people never do) reveals what that means to the Steger area. The minority students required to integrate all the elementary schools reside in what would logically be a Steger attendance area. While this patchwork of non-contiguous attendance areas, for which I drew the boundaries many years ago. is not what one would choose, it does integrate the schools, and seems to be the only way to do so.

Specifically, Clark's non-contiguous area is immediately across the street (Brownbert) from Steger and west of Steger. Edgar Road's minorities are located across the street (Rock Hill Road) just east of Steger. Bristol leapfrogs across the Edgar Road bloc and picks up minority students from a non-contiguous area northeast of Steger, and Bristol's regular boundary on the north almost reaches Steger. Most of Avery's minority students live just east of Steger and west of Kirkham. Even Hudson needs minority students from south of Manchester.

Consequently, most of the students who should logically attend a Steger elementary school are needed to integrate the existing schools. Allowing them to attend Steger would make it a majority minority school and basically resegregate the other elementary schools, except for VICC students, who are gradually declining in number. In other words, integrating the District isn't feasible, indeed hardly possible, if Steger is an elementary school. (That's why Douglass School also had to go long ago.) Thus Steger is left with virtually no students. Creating an attendance area to result in 300-350 elementary students at Steger would require a gerrymandered boundary worthy of a legislative redistricting committee!

If the District continues its commitment to integrating all schools, and I think it should, what are some other implications for Steger being an elementary school? Geographically, moving 100-125 students west of Kirkham from Avery to Steger would be a reasonable move to alleviate Avery's overcrowding, except for the fact that virtually all the students would be minority. Secondly, if Steger becomes just

another elementary attendance area similar to the others, why would the Computer School students continue at Steger? It seems likely that most of them would opt to return to their home attendance area since people generally value and feel loyalty to their neighborhood schools—and I assume that denying them that option would create a major problem.

Parenthetically, I suggested closing the Computer School 25 years ago. Initially its computer immersion environment was clearly different from the other schools, but within a few years it was no more a “computer” school than the other schools. Its name has long been a misnomer albeit a unique name—don’t know of another school named Computer. It has continued rather unobtrusively almost as a small private school. It’s a particularly good school because it is populated by consistently engaged and caring parents who elect to send their children there. Their results usually stand out among the state’s small schools. I have friends who have been delighted that their children were admitted to the school and they have been highly pleased with their children’s experience. Neither have I heard any clamor to close the school, which is one good argument for retaining it. Nevertheless, while I don’t know, I doubt that the curriculum and instructional methodology are now different from the other schools. So, is its existence really justified?

Until one tries to draw a Steger elementary attendance area, it is easy to understand why he/she would assume that converting Steger to an elementary school is a logical solution to the elementary space needs. Based on information presented, however, apparently nobody has examined what the boundaries would have to look like, nor is anyone even scheduled to do so until after the election. The phrase in the presentation that site changes may necessitate “possible boundary changes” is quite an understatement. Under the proposed scenario, boundary changes aren’t just “possible;” they would be absolutely unavoidable--unless Steger had no attendance area.

Steger’s not having an attendance area and being a school of choice is of course another option. That arrangement, however, would not likely preserve the Computer School’s current characteristics. If not, how many of its students would elect to continue attendance there? And why would other students elect to go to Steger rather than their home attendance school unless there were something very special about Steger? Is it realistic to think that Steger could be so different as to attract some 300 students? If so, would it be desirable to make Steger that different from the other schools, implying that Steger would be better than the other schools? If it turns out that there are an insufficient number of students to attend Steger, what happens to that site?

Stated and implied in some of the justification for Prop W is providing for growth. Based upon enrollment numbers from DESE’s website through 2014 (below), I see no evidence that enrollment will change significantly. While enrollment is up from seven years ago, it is lower than it was from 1993 through 1997 since which time substantial space and capacity have been added. Kindergarten is the smallest of all current classes.

While no pre-school projections have been presented so far as I know, I would be surprised if they indicated significant growth. Further, there are no bubbles in the enrollment pipeline. Class sizes are remarkably evenly distributed. The average for K-5 is 342, grades 6-8 is 343, grades 9-12 is 331, and the average for all grades is 339. It would be hard to find a more stable enrollment.

1993	4106	2004	4145
1994	4459	2005	4116
1995	4424	2006	4068
1996	4470	2007	4103
1997	4478	2008	4127
1998	4384	2009	4175
1999	4316	2010	4248
2000	4274	2011	4271
2001	4284	2012	4327
2002	4208	2013	4368
2003	4230	2014	4406

Webster Groves class size numbers for 2014:

K	304 <i>324</i>	7	349
1	358	8	344
2	344	9	348
3	338	10	326
4	375	11	333
5	331	12	319
6	337		

So the growth factor is hardly an issue. Additions and modifications as proposed in Plan B would provide well for current and projected needs. Avery is obviously in serious need of immediate relief, either with additional space and/or a boundary change. As indicated earlier, moving minority students on the west side of Avery's attendance area to a Steger school is not desirable because of the integration issue. Moving students who live on the south side of I-44 from Avery to Edgar Road would likely be a more logical alternative. If it is desirable to move a few students south from Bristol to Clark, a small area south of Algonquin and west of the Union Pacific tracks would seem a logical move, although boundary changes, no matter how small or reasonable, are seldom viewed in logical terms!

Based on the foregoing discussion, I believe that implementing the Plan B provisions will ultimately be the responsible way to go. However, at this point in the middle of a campaign, commitment has to remain unequivocally with Plan A. I hope very much that both propositions pass since I believe there can be a reasonable way afterward to get from Plan A to Plan B. If Prop W passes, the sequence of steps to implement it will be crucial. Drawing boundary lines to convert Steger to an elementary school should be the first and immediate step after the election in order to prove or

disprove the feasibility of doing so. If my contentions were proven to be true, the District would need to acknowledge that it just won't work and move from Plan A to Plan B. If that were the case, this intelligent community is likely to be far more accepting of a change of direction than of following through with a flawed plan that was unworkable and undesirable. Plan B is preferable not because it's cheaper, but because it meets existing needs, minimizes the need for boundary changes, and does not create future problems and issues.

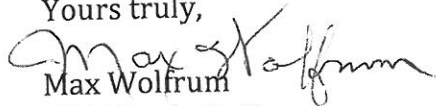
Since by far the largest portion of the bond issue is devoted to expansion of Hixson to house sixth graders, that expansion should definitely be placed on hold until workable and desirable elementary attendance areas have been determined. Incidentally, the proposed site enhancements for Hixson and Moss Field would be dramatic improvements and should be effected even if the sixth grade did not move to Hixson.

I did not want to raise these questions in public because they could not be answered definitively and would create confusion. Most importantly, I don't want in any way to compromise passage of the Propositions. Neither do I plan to write letters of opposition to the media nor to conduct any effort to defeat the issue, nor even to make any effort to share or promote my views to other parties since I very much hope both issues will pass. It should be possible to responsibly make any needed corrections after passage and compilation of additional information.

Because I no longer have grandchildren in the schools and have very little direct association with the schools, and because my knowledge is generally out of date and sketchy, I seldom speak up about issues. I do believe, however, that my concerns in this instance deserve consideration either to disprove them or somehow to accommodate them. Not to do so could leave a future administration and school board with major and unnecessary challenges and issues.

Passage of recent operating levy increases and major bond issues indicates that the administration and Board of Education enjoy a high level of trust and integrity in the community. I have no doubt that the rationales for the current proposals are the result of much effort, are responsible and well intended. If I am correct, however, the provisions of Prop W are simply based on insufficient information and incorrect assumptions.

Yours truly,


Max Wolfrum
536 Elizabeth Dr
Webster Groves, MO 63119

Copies: Members, Board of Education
Ms Diane Moore
Ms Catherine Vespereny

Max Wolfrum
536 Elizabeth Dr.
Webster Groves, MO 63119

Dear Dr. Wolfrum,

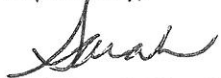
Thank you for all the information you provided the Board of Education, Diane Moore, Cathy Vespereny and me. Most importantly, thank you for your continued support of the Webster Groves School District. You have always been a strong supporter and have a vast knowledge of the history of the district and the issues we face.

You addressed several issues in your letter, most of which centered on Prop W. The district utilized a large committee of staff and citizens to examine the facility needs throughout the district. This was a year-long study and resulted in a formal report to the Board of Education. Then the district formed another large committee composed of staff and citizens to study the feasibility of creating a 6-8 center at the Hixson site. We visited local middle schools, read current literature on middle schools, and looked at a variety of data. In the end, our report to the Board outlined what we felt needed to happen if a 6-8 center was developed at the Hixson site. Then the Building Advisory Committee, which is composed of local citizens with expertise in areas related to facilities, examined the work of the Facilities Committee and of the 6-8 Committee. They worked to put together the cost of two different proposals. Their final recommendation was the plan that is before our community today – known as Prop W.

I know you have several reservations regarding Prop W. It might be helpful if we sat together to discuss these further. It would be helpful for me to learn from your history and hopefully helpful to you to hear our current thinking on the situation. Please feel free to call me at 314-918-4008 to schedule a time that would work for both of us.

Please know that I honor your history with the district, honor the work you did with our district in the past, and value the information you shared with us.

Respectfully,



Sarah Booth Riss, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

CC Board of Education
Diane Moore,
Cathy Vespereny

Jane Baumgartner

From: Sarah Riss
Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2015 2:32 PM
To: Jane Baumgartner
Subject: FW: Spend Wisely or Educate Beautifully?

For the communication log.

Sarah

Dr. Sarah Booth Riss
Superintendent of Schools
Webster Groves School District
314-961-1233

From: Dave Buck [mailto:dave@buckstl.com]
Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2015 2:25 PM
To: Sarah Riss; Steve Loher; Eric Dunn; Jean Dugan; Cathy Vespereny; Emerson Smith; Amy Clendennen; David Addison; Joel Oliver; Michael Shipley; John Simpson; Diane Moore; Linda Holliday
Cc: Jon Clark; glenn.detrick@gmail.com
Subject: Re: Spend Wisely or Educate Beautifully?

Sarah,

Thanks for your reply and in quick response:

1. Your reply is just what I have been talking about relative to the quality and trust of the people and not just hard, cold numbers.
2. I do think that it is very bad form for any Council member to so publically criticize the school district over its tax history and plan when the Council has been chronically underperforming its goal of increasing the community's commercial tax base.
3. Given that public school education is the backbone of our global society and Webster Groves community, I am totally surprised that a Council member would speak out so critically and negatively against them.
4. I agree 100% that it is simply bad form for the opposing view point not give the school district the courtesy of a meeting to hear each other side out. For what it is worth, he has not responded to me either and I do not expect he will. I doubt, quite honestly, that Greg is willing to listen, change or concede his position. If this was a court case and trial, Greg has his defense and he plays to win the game, not compromise or collaborate with the opposing side.
5. Greg and his followers appear to be 100% Catholic school families. So they are already paying a private school tuition. And it seems that most all of these families are affluent by Webster Groves standards. Nonetheless, maybe they wish to avoid and fight a community wide tax increase on the school district that their kids don't attend. Again, read Greg's arguments - they are all about the household financial impact of S&W. It's all about the taxes, all about the money.

6. Here's a long shot reason for Greg's motives and actions: the next mayor election will be in April 2016 and it is likely Gerry Welch will not run again after 20 years in office. Who knows? Greg may be planning on running for mayor in 2016 and fighting back a tax increase might add to his campaign.

7. For whatever it's worth from my years of consumer marketing, consumers are obviously interested in how much they will be paying or how much an item costs. But consumers don't just spend money; they buy quality products that deliver important, needed benefits.

To me, ultimately, the school district should not wage a "numbers" or tax war with Greg & company. That's a zero sum, lose-lose game to me.

All Greg has is the numbers and his argument to reduce or eliminate the proposed taxes. But what Greg doesn't have and can't promise is a quality product that delivers important, needed benefits.

In that regard, four thoughts:

a. Instead of playing the tax money game, put yourself in the shoes of a current 3rd grader and how will this kid's education & learning experience will change if S&W doesn't pass. It's one thing to penalize the school district, but quite another to penalize a kid. Stated differently, a famous quote goes, "For every short-term decision, there's a long-term consequence." The long-term consequence is what happens to the kids if S&W doesn't pass. In short, it's not the monetary tax gap difference, but the new education gap as measured between the current and that possible/desired.

b. Much of what has driven the district's success has been purposeful innovation and expansion, such as the Walter Ambrose playscape, the new high school wing, the Detrick experiential center, etc. What happens if this strategy is not allowed to continue do to S&W not passing?

c. Interview some of the new families who have moved into the district so their kids can receive an outstanding education. See what they think about S&W and the district's plans not moving forward if S&W are defeated.

d. Interview some North Webster parents and families on what it means to them for Steger to return a neighborhood school since Douglass School closed in 1978.
Hope this helps.

Dave

From: Sarah Riss <Riss.Sarah@wgmail.org>

Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2015 12:52 PM

To: Dave Buck; Steve Loher; Eric Dunn; Jean Dugan; Cathy Vespereny; Emerson Smith; Amy Clendennen; David Addison; Joel Oliver; Michael Shipley; John Simpson; Diane Moore; Linda Holliday

Cc: Jon Clark; glenn.detrick@gmail.com

Subject: RE: Spend Wisely or Educate Beautifully?

Dave,

Thank you for your strong support of the WGSD. Please know that we value the support of our community and of people like you. We believe our community expects and deserves us to do better than average work with our

children. We expect our staff to do their best work each and every day and we expect our children to achieve both academic and personal success. This requires more than simply high test scores. It requires time for children to explore, time for them to create, and time for them to socialize with each other. It requires time for them to discover and pursue their passions and to engage in activities that truly enable them to make a difference in the world and to feel empowered to do so. Thank you for taking the time to listen and to study the issues with us. I only wish that everyone that disagrees with us would take the time to meet with us as you have done.

Have a great spring!

Sarah

Dr. Sarah Booth Riss
Superintendent of Schools
Webster Groves School District
314-961-1233

From: Dave Buck [<mailto:dave@buckstl.com>]

Sent: Wednesday, March 18, 2015 1:28 PM

To: Steve Loher; Eric Dunn; Jean Dugan; Cathy Vespereny; Emerson Smith; Amy Clendennen; David Addison; Joel Oliver; Michael Shipley; Sarah Riss; John Simpson; Diane Moore; Linda Holliday

Cc: Jon Clark; glenn.detrick@gmail.com

Subject: Spend Wisely or Educate Beautifully?

Everyone,

As most of you hopefully know by now, I will vote YES for S & W. To Steve Loher and Eric Dunn, I hope my attendance and remarks at last night's City Council did not hurt or diminish your respective terrific remarks. I was there on my own, simply as a district parent & grandparent and not as an official school district representative. Specifically, my primary purpose was to talk to Council member, Greg Mueller, given his strong NO position on S&W.

Greg and I are hardly close friends but I think Greg is a good guy, a good Council member and a good lawyer who is good at making his case of compelling evidence and arguments. From a distance, he seems to be a very well-liked and influential figure in Webster Groves and, as such, is well-connected with a very influential segment of our community. As such, his NO position should be a wake-up call for the district.

To me, Greg's NO vote was unexpected and surprisingly serious, per his SpendWisely.org web site he created and apparently personally funded. That's why I simply asked him last night for the chance to sit down with him so that I could better understand his position and he better understand mine.

As of 1:00 pm this afternoon, I have not heard from Greg. Maybe later today. But, to be honest, I do not think I will ever hear back, consistent with Greg's refusal to accept an invitation to meet with school district administration and school board members.

Personally, I think such differences of opinion and debate, particularly on big issues like these, is good and healthy for a community. After all, we are all on the same Webster Groves team. We are not enemies, but allies united in a greater cause. As such, we can accomplish more through cooperation and collaboration than we can through competition and contention. Who knows? Maybe if the opposing viewpoints sat down, everyone might reach a new, mutual understanding. But we will never know if we don't try.

Last night, I shared with Greg that I had four "new" perspectives and arguments that perhaps he has not considered yet. I said I would share these with the school district first so, for what it's worth, here goes:

1. There is an old simple wisdom that goes, "Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." The REAL tax problem we have in Webster Groves is our small commercial tax base, which is the #1 reason why Webster Groves residents have high real estate property taxes. This has been our community's long-time financial reality, dilemma and opportunity. City Hall and City Council are primarily responsible for growing the commercial tax base. I thus find it disingenious, if not a major cheap shot, that anyone on the City Council would throw stones and criticize the school district for tax mismanagement when Council lives in a big glass house that is not in order and severely lacking. Maybe Council should take a hard look in the mirror and take care of its own tax responsibilities before it criticizes somebody else. Stated differently, when it comes to their tax criticisms, Council doesn't have a leg to stand on.

I wonder if Greg considered this small detail in his own deliberations???

2. For a real-world perspective, let's compare the recent experiences of two Webster Groves public and taxable entities: the Webster Groves Public Library and the Webster Groves Public School District. In 2010, the Library initiated a major expansion project that required a major bond issue. By all accounts, the project was a disaster. It run way over budget, way over deadline and there is still a law suit in court with the contractor. Conversely, the new wing of the high school required a major bond issue, but this project was the model of effective and efficient management, as the new wing came in under budget, on schedule and delivered a beautiful and functional new wing that improved learning and relieved overcrowding.

In short, the school district has a sterling and proven track record of managing big projects and big projects exceptionally well. I wonder if Greg took this under consideration???

3. Douglass School was the first school, and first all-black school, in Webster Groves and existed in the North Webster neighborhood for 86 years, closing in 1978. Steger's conversion to a traditional elementary school will return a true neighborhood school to North Webster and surrounding neighborhoods for the first time in 37 years. Personally, this action may be the single most symbolic, important and significant within everything S & W will accomplish, particularly as it relates to further promoting social justice and education equality within the district. The Alliance for Interracial Dignity is in the process of developing tangible actions to pursue its mission. In this context, Steger becoming a neighborhood school is HUGE!

I wonder if Greg has thought Steger in this way??? Maybe some things are a little more important than money.

4. Finally, in my 37 year business career to date, I have learned not to trust the numbers. In this case, and being honest, I do not trust the district's numbers and I do not trust Greg's numbers, who basically is using the district's same numbers but tells a different narrative. I do not trust numbers because numbers are too easily twisted, shaped and molded to support any position.

I prefer to trust the people instead. And if I think they are continuing to earn my trust. I am from a long line of teachers who emgrained in me early that 1) public education is the backbone of our society, and 2) teaching is the most noblest and most important profession on earth, where regardless of the teaching aid (reading books, workbooks, technology, etc.), learning and education is a human art and its success depends on the sacred human connection between teacher and student.

I have been a parent in the district for 15 years and I try to make it to my share of board meetings and sit on a couple of committees. There is no way I could possibly know everything or every detail of S & W and every decision that makes the district run. But I can trust all those who do.....and I DO trust them, unconditionally.

To me, it's impossible to quantify trust. You cannot put a hard number on it. But you know it and feel it when it exists. My mom always said that "Communities move forward at the speed of trust." When there is no trust, there is no progress. I think our community has trusted and put its faith in the school district and moved forward together for a long, long time and they have earned our trust throughout. It has been a wonderful collaboration and partnership - why would we not trust the school district now? Greg?

Here is but one of hundreds of examples: High School Principal, Jon Clark. I think the guy is a gift to the district whose personal humility, living by The Golden Rule and generosity combines with a soft-spoken, proactive leadership style that students, faculty and staff choose to follow. Personally, I'd follow him anywhere. I like and trust him that much.

See, Greg, it's not about the money. It's not about trusting the numbers. Your kids do not attend district schools, then maybe you might see things differently. I bet your kids would. The difference between us is that you are urging residents to Spend Wisely, where I am asking them to Educate Beautifully.

In closing, if your family is like mine, we make plenty of mistakes where, on what and how we spend money. But if we are to err on the side of success in any part of our lives, it is in education. It is an easy decision, especially when you trust the folks who ignite the curiosity and inspire our kids every day.

Hope this helps.

Dave Buck
952-0910

Jane Baumgartner

From: Sarah Riss
Sent: Monday, March 23, 2015 9:40 AM
To: Jane Baumgartner
Subject: FW: There Is Nothing More Powerful Than An Idea Whose Time Has Come!

For the communication log

Sarah

Dr. Sarah Booth Riss
Superintendent of Schools
Webster Groves School District
314-961-1233

From: Dave Buck [mailto:dave@buckstl.com]
Sent: Monday, March 23, 2015 9:36 AM
To: Sarah Riss; John Simpson; Diane Moore; Cathy Vespereny; Linda Holliday; Emerson Smith; Steve Loher; Jean Dugan; Amy Clendennen; David Addison; Joel Oliver; Michael Shipley
Subject: Re: There Is Nothing More Powerful Than An Idea Whose Time Has Come!

Thanks, as always, Sarah for your thoughtful reply. Five other quick points:

1. A week ago I publically invited Greg at the last City Council meeting to sit down to share positions and have a conversation on S&W. Nothing yet from Greg so the district office is not alone. All of Greg's taxes and numbers mean beans without some common, everyday kindness, decency and courtesy to go with them.
2. Greg's big final line on his web site, emails and letters-to-the-editor is "the 5th and 6th tax increase (S&W) in 10 years is TOO MUCH." If I ever do talk with Greg, I will simply ask him, "Why?" What does he base this on? Frequency? Levels? Families complaining and moving out of Webster Groves out of protest? Families going into bankruptcy? Something else? Since Greg likes numbers so much, has he quantified what too much means, or is it just his own personal viewpoint?
3. What is so dangerous, negative, hurtful and destructive in Greg's position is that through the tax information he lists, he paints a totally inaccurate and untruthful picture that the district mismanages its finances and that its expenses are out-of-control, all adding up to and leaving a net impression of neglect, abuse, waste and being asleep at the wheel.

Personally, as with any public corporation, the public has very right to hold such organizations accountable. But Greg's perception he is reinforcing is not reality or the truth.

4. Correspondingly, Greg NEVER mentions or acknowledges any of the good and progress that was created because of the tax and bond monies the district received. Greg is quick to mention the 2010 \$36 million bond issues but failes to acknowledge or recognize the magnificent new wing to the high school that was built under budget and on schedule.

5. As you know, without real estate tax revenue from the community, there would be no school district. As such, communities move forward at the speed of trust. If there is no trust, there is no progress. For a very long time, the community and school district have earned, built and nurtured a strong tradition of mutual public trust and have moved forward together, enriching our kids and the community along the way. It seems like both the community and school district, without complaint or argument, have kept the trust over the period Greg references, 2005 and 2010. Why does Greg believe that the community is all of a sudden going to change gears and start distrusting the district in 2015? To my knowledge, even Greg did not object or protest to the 2010 tax and bond issue. Bottom-line: I believe that the community's & district's tradition of trust will win out over a concern over taxes.

Dave

From: Sarah Riss <Riss.Sarah@wgmail.org>

Sent: Monday, March 23, 2015 7:57 AM

To: Dave Buck; John Simpson; Diane Moore; Cathy Vespereny; Linda Holliday; Emerson Smith; Steve Loher; Jean Dugan; Amy Clendennen; David Addison; Joel Oliver; Michael Shipley

Subject: RE: There Is Nothing More Powerful Than An Idea Whose Time Has Come!

Dave,
Thank you for reminding us all that this is about children and they type of educational experience we provide them in the future. By-the-way, Leslie Bennet is a parent of alums, a resident, and a Hixson PE teacher. Thank you for helping us look forward to a fabulous future and all the possibilities this plan could bring.

Sarah

Dr. Sarah Booth Riss
Superintendent of Schools
Webster Groves School District
314-961-1233

From: Dave Buck [<mailto:dave@buckstl.com>]

Sent: Sunday, March 22, 2015 4:54 PM

To: Sarah Riss; John Simpson; Diane Moore; Cathy Vespereny; Linda Holliday; Emerson Smith; Steve Loher; Jean Dugan; Amy Clendennen; David Addison; Joel Oliver; Michael Shipley

Subject: There Is Nothing More Powerful Than An Idea Whose Time Has Come!

Everyone,

I do not know her, but I loved Leslie Bennet's Mailbag letter in last Friday's W-K Times. She did not dwell or focus on fixing problems or patching holes. You could tell that she wrote passionately about something much bigger and more important that she believed in to her core: the power and importance of the Moss Field idea.

Then it hit me: Propositions S & W are really not about fixing an overcrowding problem, keeping class sizes small and maintaining strong teacher salaries. They are something much bigger and more important.

Many of my business peers join me in believing that there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. Greg Mueller & company argues taxes and numbers but they do not have an idea.

In my career, instead of saving money, consumers ideally would much rather spend and invest their money on a future idea or a vision of hope for a better world, or a quality product that delivered relevant, meaningful and compelling benefits.

You may not agree but, to me, WGSD is an idea - a BIG idea - whose time has come. Joining its mission, the district has a bold new vision that will guide it to future greatness: a dynamic learning community, led by purposeful innovation to help everyone discover and pursue their passions to change the world. Our residents have never really seen this before or perhaps understand its grand intention.

Additionally, Hixson is more than just adding a 6th grade wing. Hixson is a powerful idea whose time has come. Hixson's new design is consistent with your vision and result is an innovative three-grade education opportunity and will position and advance Hixson into the future.

Leslie Bennet has captured the idea of Moss Field.

From my perspective, the real idea of Steger is below and attached via a letter-to-the-editor I have submitted to the Webster-Kirkwood Times. They may choose to run it or not. So, in the meantime, I wanted to share it with you.

My point is that maybe the district can or can't win a numbers argument with Greg Mueller. Maybe you have won it already. I'm simply sharing, as food for thought, that whereas Greg focuses on the taxes we'll pay, I prefer to center on and sell the big picture of the district's vision, mission and strategic plan and all of the human and public good that will be achieved.

Dave Buck

Don't Forget the Human Face and Emotion of S&W

This debate has been so focused on property taxes, we have completely forgotten there are real human lives to consider beyond our own financial interests. This shares a different perspective that puts a human face and emotion on S&W reflecting many families in our community.

You may have never heard of Douglass Elementary School, but I guarantee our African-American friends and residents have, several of whom attended Douglass as kids and remember it with great affection and pride.

Douglass was the first public school ever in Webster Groves and the first all-black school. It was located in the historic black neighborhood of North Webster and served as its neighborhood school for 86 years, closing in 1978.

If S&W passes, the current Steger 6th Grade Center will be converted to a new traditional elementary school. When that happens, the new Steger Elementary School will mark the return of a neighborhood school in North Webster and surrounding neighborhoods for the first time in 37 years!

Early reactions from neighborhood residents to this possibility range from joy to gratitude. And they share a common dream of seeing their own kids and grandkids finally walking back and forth to their neighborhood school for the first time in their young lives.

Given the times we live in, this may just be the single most symbolic and significant goal S & W will achieve. Not only will education make a difference in these kids' lives, but it will further promote social justice, interracial dignity and education equality for all within the district.

The spirit and historical significance of Douglass School can live again in Steger to inspire a new generation of neighborhood kids. I have it on very good authority: these kids and their parents say YES to S&W!

Dave Buck
Webster Groves

Jane Baumgartner

From: Sarah Riss
Sent: Wednesday, April 01, 2015 3:21 PM
To: Jane Baumgartner
Subject: FW: Quick Feedback

For the communication log. I emailed him a thank you back.

Sarah

Dr. Sarah Booth Riss
Superintendent of Schools
Webster Groves School District
314-961-1233

From: Dave Buck [<mailto:dave@buckstl.com>]
Sent: Wednesday, April 01, 2015 2:50 PM
To: Sarah Riss
Cc: John Simpson; Diane Moore; Linda Holliday; Cathy Vespereny; Emerson Smith; Jean Dugan; Steve Loher; Michael Shipley; Amy Clendennen; David Addison; Joel Oliver
Subject: Quick Feedback

Sarah,

We had out-of-town family over for dinner last night so I missed the actual 7-8pm timeslot, but I went online later that night and read the posted transcript.

Quick feedback:

1. You did a terrific job deftly and effectively handing a range of different questions. I do not know if you answered these questions solely on your own or had a little help in the room, but your command of all the facts and numbers was quite impressive.
2. As I have said before, all of the numbers surrounding S&W is mind-dumbing and very confusing, to me. That is why I do not have big trust in any numbers. But your responses were a case in point why I prefer to trust people more. I read everyone's arguments over and over but I know who I trust and I trust you.
3. Additionally, to me, this whole S&W issue boils down to does each resident think and believe that what the district wants to achieve is worth the money. It's no different when considering any purchase, whether it be a new home, a new car or a new tube of toothpaste. As consumers, we make an assessment of a product's value, then decide if it's worth the price. This district wants to accomplish some definite, important things and move forward. Is this effort and goals worth the money to me? Absolutely YES!

May April 7 reveal the same for the community.

Dave

Jane Baumgartner

From: Sarah Riss
Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2015 5:32 PM
To: Jane Baumgartner
Subject: FW: My Favorite Quotes for Times Like These

Please put in the communication log

Sarah

Dr. Sarah Booth Riss
Superintendent of Schools
Webster Groves School District
314-961-1233

From: Sarah Riss
Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2015 5:31 PM
To: 'Dave Buck'
Subject: RE: My Favorite Quotes for Times Like These

Thanks for the great quotes and kind words of encouragement. They really do mean a lot to me and to our team.

Sarah

Dr. Sarah Booth Riss
Superintendent of Schools
Webster Groves School District
314-961-1233

From: Dave Buck [<mailto:dave@buckstl.com>]
Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2015 9:44 AM
To: Sarah Riss; John Simpson; Diane Moore; Cathy Vespereny; Linda Holliday; Emerson Smith; Steve Loher; Jean Dugan; David Addison; Amy Clendennen; Michael Shipley; Joel Oliver
Subject: My Favorite Quotes for Times Like These

Everyone,

Here goes, for what it's worth:

Never be afraid to try. - Outward Bound

The ultimate measure of a person is not where he or she stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he or she stands in times of challenge and controversy. - Martin Luther King

It's not whether you get knocked down, it's whether you get up. - Vince Lombardi

Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered with failure, than to take rank with those poor souls who neither enjoy much or suffer much because they live in the great twilight that knows neither victory or defeat. - Theodore Roosevelt

Energy and persistence conquer all things. - Benjamin Franklin

There is ALWAYS more than one right answer to every problem and opportunity.

Something good always comes out of something bad. - My Mom

From this one resident and parent's standpoint, last night's results were unfortunate but, when viewed against the backdrop of the district's 130 year proud history, they are a hiccup, a temporary setback at best. You dared, were bold and swung for the fences and your grand slam ball simply fell a few yards short of the center field wall.

As shared in previous emails, Greg Mueller is a smart, tough adversary who was serious and committed to his mission as the organized opposition. I do not have any problem with the hand Greg played, but I have major problems with HOW he played his hand as, in my book, it wasn't fair, kind or honest.

I have always believed in celebrating and recognizing the valiant tries and great effort, even if they come up short. The district has absolutely nothing to apologize for. We parents were right with you 100% of the way. As such, I hope you all take some time to celebrate and recognize your try and effort. Such a try and effort deserve and demand our attention and respect.

Finally, per Vince Lombardi's quote above, if you need an engaged parent to help you get up by providing new and different thinking and creative solutions as you chart a second right answer, please know that I am hear to help your great cause any way that I can.

Dave Buck
952-0910
dave@buckstl.com

Jane Baumgartner

From: Sarah Riss
Sent: Friday, April 10, 2015 1:35 PM
To: Dave Buck
Cc: Jane Baumgartner
Subject: RE: The BIG IDEA:: Reimaging WGSD's Window of Opportunity

Thanks Dave! I love the encouragement and forward thinking. We will enter your email into the communication log.

Sarah

Dr. Sarah Booth Riss
Superintendent of Schools
Webster Groves School District
314-961-1233

From: Dave Buck [mailto:dave@buckstl.com]
Sent: Friday, April 10, 2015 1:26 PM
To: Emerson Smith; Steve Loher; Jean Dugan; David Addison; Amy Clendennen; Michael Shipley; Joel Oliver; Sarah Riss; John Simpson; Diane Moore; Cathy Vespereny; Linda Holliday
Subject: The BIG IDEA:: Reimaging WGSD's Window of Opportunity

Everyone,

With every door that's closed, a window of opportunity opens.....WIDE!!!!

I see you are having a closed session from 6 - 7 pm in this coming Monday's BOE meeting to confer about Tuesday's results and, more importantly, how best to move forward.

In that regard, it appears I have another commitment and will not be able to attend your regular 7 pm meeting and share my public comments. So here they are:

Preface:

- Creative thinking is about thinking differently. Much of the district's core value of "Innovation" is about coming up with a new & different creative solution to a difficult problem, such as what the district now faces.
- As such, when a hoped for solution is eliminated, the challenge is to never lose hope, evolve, adapt and create something new, different and even better. Human beings are like that - they rise to the challenge and find a way to conquer their frustration, disappointment and obstacles and thrive.
- In this regard, there is the one part of Greg Mueller's SpendWisely.org web site I agree with in lieu of S&W not passing: "Unleash the *creative powers* of the Webster Groves School District to find ideas and cost-conscious solutions within the \$57 million dollar budget and utilizing the \$14 million dollar fund reserves."

Relevant Story to Learn From:

Here is one of many relevant stories from which motivation, hope and learning can be drawn. Several universities and other schools have been conducting experiments where students are formed into living groups and are directed NOT to be consumers and not to spend any money or make any purchases for 1-2 months, except for food and needed personal medications.

After the experiments, here is what universities are learning:

1. Students successfully adapt and thrive, despite the eliminations and restrictions.
2. Students are just as happy because they adjust and learn to be happy with what they have, not based on new things they want, buy and own.
3. Students discover that simpler is better, less is more and that they can do more with less. They learn to conserve, not waste, and get the most use out of what they have.
4. Society is based on a scarcity mentality, i.e., you are scarce because you do not have something, so you feel the desire to go out and buy it. But students naturally learn and adopt an abundance mindset, i.e., that they feel "abundant" because they really had everything they needed. As such, they did not define their lives by the social expectation and pressure to shop, buy and consume more and more.
5. Students create a new "sharing" economy and living community. Student share almost everything with one another, i.e., if someone had a need, another student would share their stuff. Students did not buy anything for 1-2 months, but they thrived because they shared everything (interestingly, "share everything" is the #1 lesson in the classic book, "All I Need To Know Is What I Learned In Kindergarten").

Opportunity:

Call me crazy, I voted for S&W but I think the defeat of S&W may be the best thing that could have happened to the district. Traditional methods for funding and accomplishing goals has been shut down. Instead, WGSD has the motivation and inspiration to think differently, dare mightily, and reimagine and redefine its window of opportunity.

For me, one of many opportunities is in the first four words of the district's new vision statement: "As a learning community..." Even by its name, WGSD is a school district; it is not a learning community, not yet or not even by a long-shot. But what if we brainstormed what a real, vibrant learning community is, looks like and how it functions.

Who knows? Maybe it's a *learning & sharing* community that promotes sharing and conservation in everything the district does. Or maybe the learning community connects like never before with the greater Webster Groves community and its different businesses and organizations. To accomplish this, maybe WGSD leads with its strength and a proven and recognized core competence by fully expanding the Detrick Experiential Learning Center throughout all 10 schools and unleash its power and potential.

Think what our kids can gain and learn from creating for the world a new kind of collaborative & synergistic learning community that instills values such as giving, caring & compassion, equality, conserving, sharing, fairness, acceptance, and human connections, etc.

Additionally, how many district families, non-district residents and greater community entities would be willing and lining up to share and give of themselves and their time, money, expertise or possessions with WGSD? Net, everyone knows the district took it on the chin and my bet they will be willing to step up to help.

So much opportunity! Thanks for listening.

Dave Buck
952-0910
dave@buckstl.com

Jane Baumgartner

From: Sarah Riss
Sent: Monday, April 13, 2015 7:37 AM
To: Jane Baumgartner
Subject: FW: Next Steps for WGSD

Please put in the correspondence log.
Thanks

Sarah

Dr. Sarah Booth Riss
Superintendent of Schools
Webster Groves School District
314-961-1233

From: Sarah Riss
Sent: Monday, April 13, 2015 7:37 AM
To: Board
Subject: FW: Next Steps for WGSD

Please see the response from Diane and Emerson regarding this email you received.

Dear Mr. Gillow,

My name is Emerson Smith, President of the Board of Education. The purpose of this email is to acknowledge the receipt of your email on behalf of the Board. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas. Although our district lost the two propositions on the ballot, your Board and administrators are committed to review all options to arrive at the best outcome for our students and the District.

I agree with you that future decisions concerning the district must be led by the Board. The Board's ultimate goal is to continue to provide the best educational experience for our students while maintaining financial stability. Thanks again for your comments and supporting your school district.

Sincerely,

Emerson Smith
314-961-8476

Following is Diane and David's response.

Sarah

Dr. Sarah Booth Riss
Superintendent of Schools
Webster Groves School District
314-961-1233

From: Diane Moore
Sent: Saturday, April 11, 2015 11:50 AM
Cc: David Addison; Sarah Riss
Subject: Re: Next Steps for WGSD

Mr. Gillow,

Thank you for your very thoughtful email. You provided many excellent suggestions to consider as the district moves forward. As I am sure you would assume, there are state requirements that must be met when contemplating merging the entire school district or portions of the school district with other districts. There have been instances within Missouri when this has voluntarily occurred in the past but not often. Of course there are recent examples where this has been state mandated due to poor district performance.

I would like to direct you to the current budget information available on the district's website. Please go to the Board of Education webpage. On the left side of this page you will find the current year budget documents and the first draft of the 2015-16 budget. There are two proposed budgets available for 2015-16. One assumes successful passage of the tax levy and one assumes the tax levy does not pass. Obviously we will remove the first proposed budget since we were not successful. The board will meet in the coming months to adopt a 2015-16 budget. By state law we must have a board approved budget by July 1. This is the short term priority. The long term priority will be to carefully consider our finances and long term viability to provide a quality education to our students. I certainly welcome your thoughts as we move forward.

Sincerely,
Diane Moore

Diane Moore
Webster Groves School District
314.961.1233

On Apr 11, 2015, at 10:02 AM, Addison, David <DAddison@rgare.com> wrote:

Dear Mr. Gillow:

Thank you for your comments. I am sending your note on to our CFO, Dr. Diane Moore, who in addition to being best placed to answer financial questions about the district can also point you to the budget. Given the recent decision from the community, it is possible that rather than keeping an older version on the web site, the budget may be waiting for direction from the board before being reposted.

Regards

David

From: Drew Gillow [<mailto:drewgillow@gmail.com>]

Sent: Wednesday, April 08, 2015 8:05 PM

To: emersonsmith10@gmail.com; loher.steve@wgmail.org; addison.david@wgmail.org; clendennen.amy@wgmail.org; dugan.jean@wgmail.org; wgsdshipley@gmail.com; oliver.joel@wgmail.org

Subject: Next Steps for WGSD

Dear Board Member,

I have two children in the district and a newborn so expect to be a member of the school community for the next 18 years. Therefore, like all of you I am concerned about the schools and what happens next. I have participate in curriculum reviews and building expansion reviews.

Economic theory predicts inflationary problems for labor intensive endeavors (e.g.orchestras). Schools face the same pressures unless they find ways to reduce their cost to serve.

The most obvious way to reduce costs and increase efficiency is to follow business and economic theory and practice and leverage economies of scale. The greatest efficiency would be gained by merging with one or more other districts.

I couldn't find any budget information online or I would have performed some economic analysis.

Ideally merging with adjacent districts that don't have the same student population growth projections.

Since a full merger takes time there are quicker measures that could be initiated. For example cooperative purchasing agreements could reduce procurement staff across multiple districts and provide buying power to decrease costs.

The other option for cost reduction is to change the classroom structure. Significantly increase class sizes and implement a team approach to classroom instruction leveraging a teacher and one or more assistant teacher / teacher aids. This ties directly to economic theory. If a teacher can only teach 17-25 kids (current WGSD) and there are no efficiency improvements over time enabling a teacher to teach more children, then economic theory tells us that either (a) teacher's real salary will decrease over time or (b) the cost of education will outpace inflation over time.

I wouldn't want my real salary to decrease over time.

Clearly Webster residents feel like they pay high property taxes. 75% of those taxes go to education.

Webster Groves is always going to be more of a bedroom community without a large corporate tax opportunity. This fact reinforces the need to merge with other school districts.

A completely different approach might be to redistrict and have some outlying areas go to other school districts (e.g. Glendale go to Kirkwood). I don't know the revenue vs student cost associated with making that change so it might be a lose-lose (lose too much revenue and not enough students to eliminate the expansion needs). I will add that I make this suggestion even though I am a Glendale resident.

Thinking outside the box is something that has to be led by the board. Options like merging would eliminate some of your positions, but that is less of an impact than it will be to the administration and your responsibility is to the students.

Sincerely,
Drew Gillow