

SOS Reporter

“ Save Our Schools By Supporting Our Schools “

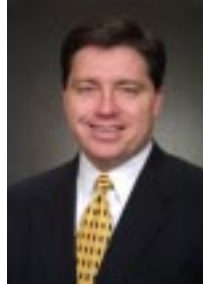
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EDUCATIONAL ISSUES NEWSLETTER

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Revisit DMPS Planning

Let citizens and governments help.
by Graham Gillette



Allow us to first dispense with the things for which this DMPS board and administration cannot be blamed. The economy began to sour before 9/11. Our country was attacked by terrorists. We went to war in two countries. Building prices went up. And, Jordan Creek Mall was built. Nobody thinks any of these are the fault of Witherspoon and company.

Yet, most of this current crisis rests on their shoulders because they refused to consider any of these negatives until it was too late. More important, they never acknowledged they knew their plan was flawed until facing the reaction to their vote to close schools.

I do not know whether the District managers actually believed the economy would rebound at a never-before-seen rate, or if they thought nobody would notice, but they kept acting as if somehow, something would come to their rescue. Nothing did, and here we are facing school closures.

We own a central kitchen in a 100-year-old building with a multimillion dollar facelift, a multi-level downtown office building which houses little more than a daycare center, and we plan to sink \$8 million more into another downtown building while on the drawing board is a proposal to put \$25 million into a technical high school.^{^^} But we are broke!

Most on the board and in the administration will point to these four projects as examples of innovation. In fact, these four projects lack even the most basic research to determine if they might make sense. This district has a history of ignoring facts and of failing to justify pet projects before committing to them.

This current crisis demands a full review of the District's spending record since the passage of the sales tax. The predicted conclusion? The district needs to get out of the building-management business.

Educators need to focus on what goes on in the classroom; and we need to turn over management of our public infrastructure to personnel with the experience and know-how to safeguard resources.

Our current school board is incapable of overseeing

both educational matters and building needs. Let's change their assignments so they do not have to. With the staggering governmental overlaps in Des Moines, joint management of our public buildings might be a good place to start the reform.

^{^^} **EDITOR'S NOTE:** In addition, the Administration has included the building of three new schools (Ewing Elementary, Three Lakes Elementary, and SE Middle School) in excess of \$44,348,120.00 (before inflation) to the Schools First plan, at the same time requesting the closing of five elementary schools due to reported funding issues.

Graham Gillette is the president of Gillette Strategic Resources, LLC and holds a Bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of South Florida. Gillette served on the Des Moines School Board --- 2001 - 2004. He was vice chair of the Des Moines Metro Transit Authority, is president of the Board of Trustees of the Des Moines Club, is a member of the Board of the Iowa Better Business Bureau, and is a director of the Plymouth Church Nursery School.

SOS Files Legal Action

In order to overturn the July 12th decision of the Des Moines School Board, three legal challenges were filed August 8th by members of the Save Our Schools Coalition. Appeals were filed with the Iowa Board of Education and the Iowa Department of Revenue, and a petition for a writ of certiorari was filed with the Polk County District Court.

The actions of the Des Moines School Board culminating in its July 12th decision to close schools and build expensive new facilities, which are not uses set out in the 10-year School Infrastructure Plan approved by the voters in 1999 in adopting the 1% local option sales tax, caused parents and citizens of the Des Moines School District to come together in a coalition known as Save Our Schools (SOS) and to seek a reversal of the School

Continued on Page 2 ...

Mark Your Calendars

CANDIDATE FORUMS:

Tuesday, Aug. 30, Park Fair Shopping Center, 7:00 pm

Tuesday, September 6, Merrill Middle School, 7:00 pm

Watch for more dates & Locations as they are confirmed.

Why Should You Get Involved With SOS?

By Gayle Murray, SOS Steering Committee Member

SOS is fast becoming a powerful coalition of concerned citizens of all ages, from every side of town, from all socio-economic levels, from many different perspectives, occupations, and areas of concern.



The common denominator for this diverse group is that we all care passionately about education. We all want and demand the very best education possible for our children and for all children in this district. We want to be full partners in the educational planning and decision making process. We feel strongly that the current leadership in this district is moving in the wrong direction.

SOS involves the two most important things that motivate most people to action; their money and their children. A few individuals are making crucial decisions about spending our money and how educating our children, without regard for the real stakeholders involved (parents, educators, community members, and taxpayers.).

School board members are supposed to be public servants; they are voted by the public as representatives of the public to make decisions that are best for the public in the entire district. An effective board is theoretically above the Superintendent of the District. In reality, ours currently function as if they are subservient to Witherspoon and the Facilities Manager

majority of board members voting to close neighborhood schools and Central Campus deliberately was deaf to our huge public outcry. They irreparably damaged the trust of the community they are elected to serve.

Our current school board is misguided in spending our Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) dollars. Heavily marketed as the answer to buildings in need or repair, the tax levy was passed as the way to bring them up to code. The current Administration and Board have repeatedly misdirected the LOST dollars into projects other than the school renovations originally promised. Renovating solid buildings is very different from new construction now being sold as the only option. In the majority of cases, new construction is NOT the best alternative and certainly is not the most cost effective. This current board ignoring solid research about smaller school size positively impacting academic achievement and other factors of academic excellence has confused quality education with big new buildings, .

****The time is now!** Never before have so many people come together from to collaborate on a unified cause. While we may differ on individuals issues, our common mission is to improve the quality of education and the quality of leadership in the district.

Change of District direction is essential. We expect this school board election on Tuesday, September 13, 2005 to attract the largest turn out in the history of the District. Please pay close attention to the candidates so you feel you are making an informed decision. SOS can be a resource as you study the various candidates and their positions on these critical issues.

See you at the forums! See you at the polls.

Legal Action

Continued From Page 1 ...

Board's decisions.

The petitioners urge that the Des Moines School Board failed substantially to comply with the rules of the Iowa Department of Education governing school closures set out in the Iowa Administrative Code (Section 281-19.1 and 281-19.2) and violated the Iowa Code (Section 423E.2) which requires that a change in the use of the local option sales tax revenues from the uses approved by the voters in 1999 must go back to the voters before such action can be taken.

SOS Profile

Gayle Murray, parent of four children; two at Adams and one at Goodrell, is Co-President of Adams Elementary PTA, an Adams Site Team Member, and Clinical Social Worker. Gayle earned her BS from Iowa State University in Psychology and Family Services, and her MSW in Social Work from University of Iowa, and she has served as Child Therapist in a School Based Position with in DMPS for 10 years.

This Week's SOS Reporter

- Revisit DMPS Planning
- SOS Files Legal Action
- Why Should You Get Involved With SOS?
- Upcoming Issues;
- The Cotton Report
- SOS Profiles
- SB Candidates

Chair: Linda Westergaard • Coordinator: Nancy Stillians

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