

SOS Reporter

“ Save Our Schools By Supporting Our Schools “

August 16, 2005

EDUCATIONAL ISSUES NEWSLETTER

Vol. 1 Num. 4

The Selling of Voodoo Math

Guest Commentary (Part 1 of 2)

by Laurance L. Tovrea,

President of the Blue and Gold Alumni Association

On July 12th, The DM School Board voted (5-2) to close five elementary schools and to sell the Central Campus (old Tech High) in a controversial decision which to many does not make sense.

The Administration* says: our buildings are not fully utilized; therefore, we must close five elementary schools because the numbers do not support them. (By arbitrary busing of children around the town, schools may be utilized, or not, depending upon the whims of the administration.)

At the same time, this Administration already has plans to build two additional elementary schools. Although tax-levy dollars can be saved and well-spent by remodeling, upgrading, and maintaining the existing schools, Witherspoon & Co. plan to spend additional money to build new schools.

Already, the Administration has prepped the media and soon will appeal formally to Polk-Des Moines tax-payers to extend the one cent sales tax levy for 10 more years.

Although plans will be vaguely defined, Witherspoon and Company plan to use the new levy funds for two new elementary schools and a new junior high (middle school), none of which are in the original *Schools-First* plan.

Those who study DM School Board spending are amazed that Witherspoon has the audacity to say the DM District is suffering a \$52 million short-fall (forcing closure of the five now legally-contested elementary buildings) when the price tag for two new elementary schools, the new middle school, and new Pappajohn addition **will cost tax-payers precisely \$52 million more** (<http://www.dmps.k12.ia.us/whatsnews/FinalSummaryforBoard07082005combined.pdf>).

Citizens have not voted nor approved any of these new expenses, but the plans are all there.

Witherspoon & Co. cannot deliver on their old promises to the public, yet now they plan to incur additional costs for new projects to be paid for by citizens who believe snippets they read in the REGISTER or sound bites they hear on television.

Why are we adding \$52 million needlessly to the Schools-First plan - when they say they are under-funded and broke? Why are we closing 5 schools to build 4?

Is Voodoo Math being touted as fiscally responsible management? Do citizens need to pay more attention to what is going on? The answer to both questions is YES.

* Witherspoon, Van Hemert, Baccam, Boesen, Borgen, Roeder, and Ward

WATCH FOR PART TWO IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

An Out Of The Box Idea

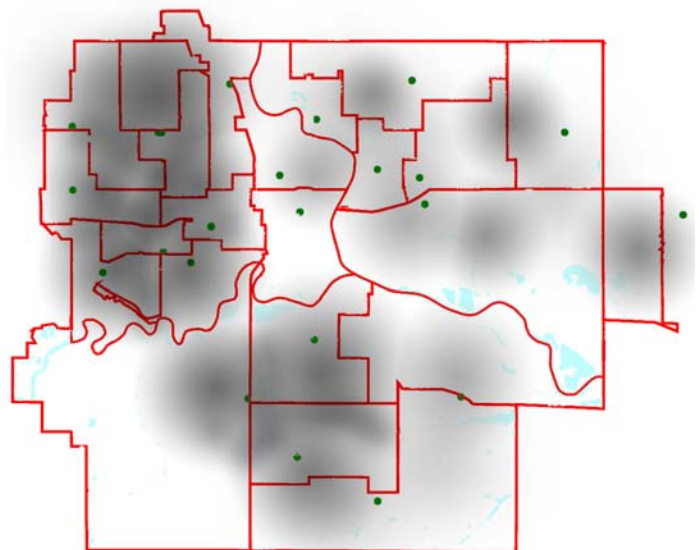
Since we organized S.O.S., we have received an avalanche of e-mails asking questions, forwarding information, giving advice and suggestions. We thank you each and all for your continued involvement as we move forward. Each of you in your own way is helping toward our goals. And together we will succeed in our mission.

By your advice and suggestions, we discovered that when individuals with diverse back grounds, knowledge and expertise come together, solutions for very complex questions begin to appear. Cyber-brain-storming has shown us that fresh and innovative ideas come forward. This out-of-the-box” thinking offers varied perspectives to on-going issues.

One recent suggestion falls into this innovative category. At first glance it seemed a little too far out of the box. Nevertheless, we discussed it, we realized the concept might offer a common-sense remedy to several complex

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Voters Responsible for current School Board



An Out Of The Box Idea

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problems. As such, it is valid input worthy of your consideration.

Edmunds Academy Building should be closed as an instructional facility. After a scant 25 years, the building, like the programs within, has deteriorated due to lack of good planning, maintenance and funding.

In the 1974-75 school year, 557 students were enrolled with a teaching staff of 25 Teachers and 7 teaching assistants. This student population resulted from closing two neighborhood schools; Bird School and Grant School. Declining enrollment occurred until 1981-82 when school desegregation rules forced Edmunds to be paired with Jefferson.

Then, the school was renamed Edmunds Academy of Fine Arts in 1984. It was touted as a Magnet School for all of Des Moines. Enrollment was 475. Full time fine arts teachers worked in drama, art, music, dance, literature, and creative expression. Additionally, full-time art, music, and physical education teachers, plus English and math instructors were available for all grade levels that Edmunds served. Also, Edmunds offered kindergarten and an Early Learning Center for four year olds.

Now attendance at Edmunds is under 200 students.

From the beginning and throughout all the years of success, Edmunds teachers complained that the "open" atmosphere was not favorable to teaching. They sited the noise and visual distractions of a windowless, spiral environment as impediments to teaching and learning.



So what is the solution? Not tearing it down. Not moving the kids from Edmunds to adowntown school as planned by Administration! Not DMPS purchase of Victorian (& near 19th century) homes and apartment buildings in the historical Sherman Hills area and demolishing them as is currently being discussed.

Land is available elsewhere for development that better serves the neighborhood. But what would happen to the current Edmunds property?

Building a new structure designed for the purpose of teaching fine arts, we again can offer the Magnet School concept, we maintain a neighborhood school, we enrich the curriculum for the minorities and disenfranchised.

The Edmunds building is far more conducive to an office atmosphere than it is for an elementary school. Let's move District offices there. District offices at 16th and Jefferson are inconvenient for staff and citizens who conduct business with the District. The Edmunds site is more accessible via freeway and bus line than the Cassidy site. Furthermore, using Cassidy as Administration it is a poor use of a traditional school site.



Moving District offices to Edmunds, opens up Cassidy to become a school building once again.

No public park is assessable with-in a half mile of the Edmunds building. To serve the community, the School District along with the City of Des Moines should convert the Northern third of the property to an urban park setting. This would serve the Homes of Oakridge and the residents of Sherman Hill.

That was just one of many ideas you have sent us. Many more (which either the Administration has not thought of, or does not want to consider) will be forthcoming in future newsletters. These range from more economical ways to manage the District to better facility usage, from ideas for better education for more children to after-school events and educational field trips. Educational enhancement by business professionals and community leaders. Those with good ideas should be heard. After-all, we do own our schools.

Send your ideas and suggestions to: coordinator@dm-sos.org

This Week's SOS Reporter

- Voodoo Math
- Out Of The Box Ideas
- "Legislators fail us"

- Upcoming Issues;
- The Cotton Report
- SOS Profiles
- SB Candidates

Chair: Linda Westergaard • Coordinator: Nancy Stillians

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Incumbent claims: “Legislators fail us!”

by Nan Stillians, S.O.S. Coordinator

Two candidates for School Board, one incumbent and her former PTA-lady cohort, are campaigning on a platform of *blame the Iowa legislature for the problems in DM schools*.

Are these valid excuses for the educational mess we now face? No. What we have here is another case of *Kill the Messengers*; only this time the messengers are up and out there in limbo land, instead of lined up at the DMPS podium and pleading or pounding it and demanding answers and accountability. Legislators are easy targets when they are out of session, especially when accusations are lobbed out of context.

For years now, Iowa legislators have been sending direct messages to Des Moines senators and reps, to our local elected officials, and to any of us voters paying attention: *CLEAN UP YOUR EDUCATIONAL MESS BEFORE EXPECTING MORE MONEY*. Recently two top political operatives repeated that same message on television.

Financial experts advise bonding, not special tax levies where accountability is nebulous. Bonding requires strict accountability. However, after a high-powered and sentimental advertising campaign, we voted a penny for saving schools.* What a lesson for us! Now our Lady Incumbent and her consorts are banking on us doing it again.**

Citizens, from all parts of town, from diverse backgrounds and economic levels, repeatedly warned

the School Board in public meetings running up to its July 12th decision that its arrogant and condescending conduct was detrimental to hopes of a renewal of the 1% local option sales tax. Five SB members, including our Lady Incumbent chose to continue on the collision course with local citizens.

Many Iowa superintendents blame the *Des Moines School Situation* (DMPS Board’s rampant squandering of levy funds) for the legislature’s refusal to vote a higher level of support to education, even to their relatively well-managed and deserving educational units around the state.

Des Moines is not the wonderful place our politicians and promoters claim. Not one Des Moines high school was listed among the Associated Press *Top 100 High Schools in Iowa*.***

Those directly responsible for Des Moines failing educational programs and chaotic *bricks & mortar* spending are: the Superintendent, a majority of Board members, and their overactive Facilities Manager. These, including our complaining Incumbent, are directly to blame, not the Iowa legislature. 🙏

* Oversight officials for the 1999 tax levy are the subject of an upcoming editorial.

** Let’s all remember the old warning: *You do it once, shame on you; you do it twice, shame on me*”.

*** Villisca HS (site the infamous axe murders made the list), but neither fabled East High or Roosevelt (in our glitzy city of corporate makeovers & takeovers & huge tax hand-outs to developers of all but the reputable kind) made it.

Reader Wonders Why...

I find it hard to believe that Witherspoon’s contract was renewed with all this spending mess going on. This would have been the perfect opportunity to clean house. I suppose we shouldn’t be surprised, though, the way most board members appear to worship the ground he walks on.

DMPS Staff Member

Citizen Questions Practice

My question / suggestion is: If there is a space problem in the elementary and high schools, why not go back to the K-6 elementary, 7-9 middle school, and 10-12 high schools? That utilizes extra elementary space we supposedly have and also eases the overcrowding of the high schools. Many surrounding districts have the same or similar format, check their websites. Parents like it. Many [teaching] staff members I know would like to see it again.

Parent

The Lincoln High Walnut

I drove out to Lincoln yesterday evening as the sun was dropping toward the western tree line; and lo and behold, all signs of the Lincoln Walnut had disappeared without a trace, except for tracks in the mud to the west of the fenced in field and the mound of vegetation where it had stood.

NS



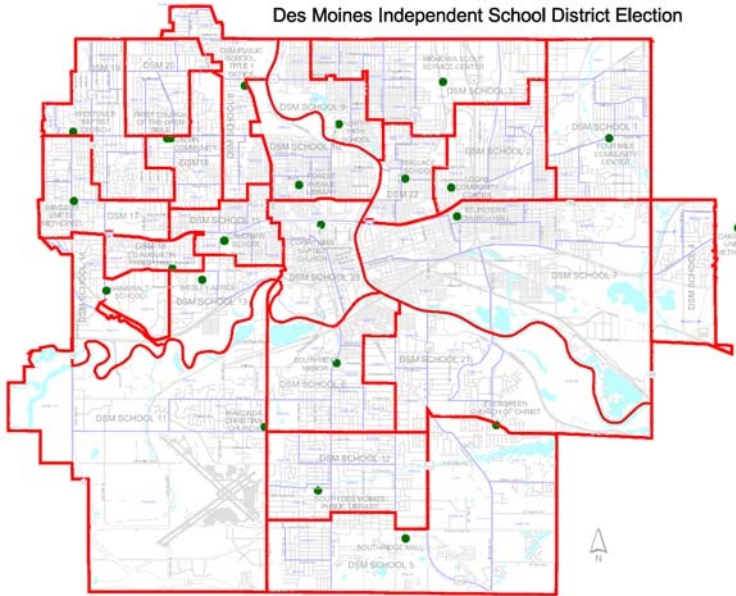
"For in the true nature of things, if we rightly consider, every green tree is far more glorious than if it were made of gold and silver."

Martin Luther

Message from the Polk County Election Office:

2005 School Board Election Polling Place Changes

Polk County school board election turnouts have been historically hovering around 10% of the eligible district voters annually. Therefore, Polk County has made some **significant changes** to the school polling places over the past few months in conjunction with neighborhood groups, activists and school boards within Polk County.



By jointly working together we will potentially save Polk County school districts between \$80,000 and \$100,000 by consolidating school polling places into manageable and convenient polling locations.

Our office has the responsibility to encourage and provide opportunities for all eligible citizens to register and vote in this important election. We are asking for your help to help us save revenue for the schools and spread the word about the polling place consolidation.

Please call our office 286-3247 or utilize our website we have created for the School Election with any questions you may have:

<http://auditor.co.polk.ia.us/2005school.htm>

Our website contains additional information that may be useful to your research, including election district maps and sample ballots. We also have a “street finder” feature that allows voters to type in their address and get their new polling location.

Together we can increase voter participation.

Mark Your Calendars

CANDIDATE FORUMS:

Thursday, Aug 25, Union Baptist Church, 6:30 pm
Tuesday, Aug. 30, Park Fair Shopping Center, 7:00 pm
Thursday, Sept. 1, First Christian Church, 7:00 pm
Wed., September 7, Merrill Middle School, 7:00 pm
Watch for more dates & Locations as they are confirmed.

MONEY! MONEY! MONEY! WE NEED It!

SOS is 501.C6 non-profit, not a 501.C3, organization. Donations to the SOS legal fund are symbols of faith in public education and in our right to redress violations of our public trust through our U.S. judicial system.

**Make checks payable to
SOS Legal Fund, mail to;
Save Our Schools, P.O. Box 1358,
Des Moines, Iowa 50305-1358.**

May our faith be rewarded and our efforts triumphant!