

SAVE TRENTON HIGH COALITION

July 24, 2008

Trenton Board of Education
108 North Clinton Avenue
Trenton, NJ 08609

Re: Trenton Central High School

Dear Board Members:

At the July 16, 2008 Facilities Advisory Board (FAB) meeting, representatives of the school district told the Save Trenton High Coalition and the public that the Board will be voting on a new Long Range Facility Plan that contemplates three new high schools with a total capacity of approximately 3,200–3,400 students. By pursuing this course, the Board understands that it will be discarding the existing state-approved plans to renovate Trenton Central High School (TCHS) for 2,400 students. These plans and the pre-development work to date have cost approximately \$12 million and will be of no further value.

Furthermore, the Board will be choosing to keep a greater number of students in current sub-standard conditions, and the taxpayers will continue to pay approximately \$1 million a year to lease the Medical Arts building (a.k.a. Crescent Temple). The district also understands that to develop an entirely new set of plans for a new high school will move the district to the back of this current funding round and jeopardize the district's chances of receiving any funds for a high school.

The Save Trenton High Coalition has actively participated in the FAB process created by the district. At the March 18, 2008 FAB meeting, we were told that the district would share the new high school model and the supporting analysis with the FAB prior to making any decision. At the July 16, 2008 FAB meeting, a district representative announced that a new model for a 1300-1500 student high school had been created and would be voted on by the Board at their July 28, 2008 meeting. No analysis was presented as to why this model was selected or what rationale was used. This is particularly distressing for two reasons:

1. Other school districts around the state that are building new high schools are choosing to build larger high schools (2,000–2,200 students), so the out of hand justification that this is simply the new way of doing business does not seem to be a strong enough argument, and
2. Choosing this model will dictate that a significant amount of the existing TCHS will not be able to be reused, which will be a waste of resources and cause considerable delays before the students receive an adequate facility.

We hope that Board members have been given a better analysis than the FAB received before they make the decision to amend the Long Range Facility Plan. If so, the Coalition would appreciate receiving a copy of the analysis.

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At the July 16, 2008 FAB meeting, the Coalition and the public were also told about the Schools Development Authority (SDA) process for evaluating school construction options. District representatives stated that the Board would like to keep the renovation option open, but in order to get renovation estimates from SDA, the Board will vote on a resolution on Monday, July 28, 2008 to “abandon” TCHS and build a brand new school. This decision-making process clearly makes no sense to any of the professionals that were in attendance at the FAB meeting.

If this truly is the process, the Coalition requests that the Board confirm that once the resolution is voted upon and the Long Range Facility Plan is amended, the SDA will provide cost estimates for the three options stated at the FAB meeting:

1. Renovation of the existing TCHS (with selective demolition)
2. Partial renovation, and partial new construction of TCHS
3. New construction of TCHS

It has been our observation that the SDA does not prefer rehabilitation and will likely bias the analysis towards new construction. We respectfully request that the Board do the following:

- Ensure that the SDA provides a written cost estimate for each alternative. The SDA should compare apples-to-apples when making the comparison, by using the same square footage, same student counts, incorporating all the design, development and remediation costs, and accounting for the time needed to complete the various phases of the project and cost escalation factors.
- Ensure that the SDA provides a written schedule for each alternative. The schedule should identify each milestone that must be met in order to achieve a Notice to Proceed of June 2010, as identified in the Capital Plan. Milestones should include approvals from various state agencies (SDA, DOE, DCA, NJDEP and SHPO) as well as a timeframe for issuing the Request for Proposals and awarding the construction contract.
- Allow professionals from the Save Trenton High Coalition to review the final SDA analyses and present the conclusions to all stakeholders and interested parties in an open public forum.

Since the SDA has made it clear to the Board that time is of the essence, we trust that the SDA will expeditiously complete the aforementioned cost analyses and schedules.

We look forward to working with the Board, District Administration, City Administration, City Council, the Schools Development Authority, the Department of Education, and our elected state representatives to ensure that Trenton’s high school students get the best educational facility possible and that the taxpayers of New Jersey get the best value for their dollars.

Sincerely,

Glenn R. Modica

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cc: Governor Jon S. Corzine, State of New Jersey
Senator Shirley Turner, State of New Jersey
Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson-Coleman, State of New Jersey
Assemblyman Reed Gusciora, State of New Jersey
Commissioner Lucille E. Davy, DOE
Scott Weiner, SDA
Regina Bleck, SDA
Joe Van Story, SDA
Mayor Douglas H. Palmer, City of Trenton
City Council, City of Trenton
Superintendent Rodney Lofton, Trenton School District
Dwayne Mosley, FAB
Calvin Thomas, FAB
Supporters of Save Trenton High Coalition (via electronic mail)