

Comment on David Paterno's "Sensible Solution" Plan for Our High School

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by

William Lowe Boyd

I am a member, and past officer, of the American Educational Research Association. I have carefully read the document that presents David Paterno's complete "Sensible Solution" plan for our High School renovation. In my professional opinion, as a professor of education, it is an outstanding plan, well thought-out, well written, and builds on strong and relevant professional expertise. It presents a systematic comparison to the plan the school board is pursuing. This comparison makes it quite clear that the Paterno plan is superior to the board's plan. Indeed, it is superior to the school board's plan on both educational and financial grounds. It is no wonder they call it the "Sensible Solution."

The Paterno Plan would provide facilities roughly equal to the board's plan, but at a savings of no less than \$30 million dollars. It would be financially irresponsible for the board to ignore this potential savings under the present circumstances. The \$30 million that can be saved should go toward the costs of renovations the board recognizes are needed in many of the district's other schools. Moreover, it would be financially irresponsible for the board to add unnecessarily to the district's tax burden, which would exacerbate the current crisis over the lack of affordable housing for families in the State College area. Adding to the tax burden will also drive up the cost for renters in the area. This is important because Penn State has the highest tuition of any American public university, and the affordability of coming here to study has become an issue. State College can't remain a vibrant and growing community and economy if we price ourselves out of the range of many students and families. Our school board has a responsibility not to behave in a financially irresponsible way.

The Paterno Plan is also superior to the board's plan on educational grounds. The board's mega-school plan puts too many students in one very large building, creating an environment that is not nurturing and developmentally sound. As I have said before, the

extensive research on the effects of school size on student learning, participation, identity, and welfare makes it clear that smaller schools are more desirable than mega-schools. Moreover, the board's mega-school plan would give us a huge school that has not been designed, architecturally, to support and facilitate the Small Schools Initiative that is their answer to the excessive size of their mega-school. Furthermore, the Small Schools Initiative involves only one 30-minute meeting a week for the small groups of students, which is at best a "band-aid" gesture toward compensating for the excessive size and anonymity of the mega-school. The board's plan is not educationally sound.

It is time – indeed past time – for our school board to listen to the extensive criticism of their unpopular plan. They have ignored and tried to squelch the mounting opposition to their plan. They ignored the overwhelming opposition to their plan voiced at the Act 34 hearing. They do not have the consent of the community. It is time – indeed well past time -- for them to begin behaving democratically and allow for a complete and open re-evaluation of what plan is best for improving our high school. It would be undemocratic and very irresponsible for them to instead push ahead with their plan.

William Boyd