

The Referenda Passed...Now What?

By Shawnta S. Barnes – April 12, 2017



On November 8, 2016, residents of the Metropolitan School District of Washington Township (MSDWT) had two questions before them on the ballot, an operation referendum and a construction referendum. MSDWT asked voters to vote yes for the referenda to improve current facilities and build new facilities, upgrade security, add programming, and maintain current staff, and add additional staff. Superintendent Dr. Woodson, her staff, and the Washington Township Parent Council through word of mouth, community meetings, emails, surveys, information on the district's website, and videos shared with voters why both the construction referendum and operation referendum were necessary. Although 70% of

Washington Township voters do not have children in the district's schools, the referenda passed with 70% of voter support.

Since the referenda passed, MSDWT has held community outreach meetings at various district schools to update stakeholders about how the district plans to use referendum funds. At the March 16 community outreach meeting held at Crooked Creek Elementary School, Dr. Woodson highlighted the many accomplishments of MSDWT students and staff. She also updated attendees about the two currently closed elementary schools, Harcourt and Wyandotte. A few days before the meeting, Dr. Woodson shared she had entered Harcourt Elementary. "I had to wear a mask and part of the building was not accessible." Instead of renovating Harcourt and Wyandotte, both schools will be demolished and rebuilt; it would be more cost-effective to rebuild than to repair and upgrade. Dr. Woodson also informed parents that next school year they would receive information about the specific changes that would take place at the school their children currently attend.

Currently, MSDWT schools are overcrowded. At Crooked Creek Elementary School all of the fourth-grade classrooms are outside in trailers due to overcrowding. A parent inquired about nonresident enrollment. Dr. Woodson responded, "Washington Township will continue to be a district of choice." Information was not shared about how nonresident enrollment factors into the overcrowding in the district's schools. Another parent wanted to know if any funds would be directed towards improving foreign language in the elementary schools since Washington Township is a fully authorized International Baccalaureate K-12 district. Dr. Woodson responded, "Not at this time."

Dr. Woodson emphasized the importance of hearing from stakeholders as they continue to make decisions. Because the district is opening an eighth elementary school, attendance boundaries will be changed. Dr. Woodson stated, "We want to know what is important to you. Would you prefer that your child attend the school closest to your home, or do you want us to balance school populations in regards to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors? We can't do both." The district also would like input about the start and end times of all schools. There is a link to the community survey on the homepage of the district's website. One more community meeting about plans for the referendum funds will be held at Fox Hill Elementary School on Thursday, April 13 at 6 p.m.

When a school district asks for input, its stakeholders should respond. If you are a Washington Township resident, make sure you complete the survey and if possible, attend the next community meeting.