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Dear Reader: Thank you for downloading this free book from Brian W. Kelly. I finished the book titled **The Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl** in November 2020. I hope you find this book the best vehicle for learning about how the WB Area School District messed a few things up with its new Taj Mahal school.

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**Double Whammy: Incompetence & Corruption  
in Public School Governance Volume I of II**

# **The Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl:**

**A Story About Toxic Corruption and Tyranny  
in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District**

by

**Richard A Holodick, Ph.D.**

**Brian W. Kelly, M.B.A.**

**A toxic board purchases a toxic site to build a toxic school**



# Attention, please!

So that the community and state and federal officials can have easy access to the contents of this book at no charge, the authors have made the book available free for the downloading at

savewbschools/littlechernobylnotok.pdf

It is offered for three months beginning on 11/15/2020 to 2/15/2021

Hard copy was once orderable from Amazon for \$16.95.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1951562305>

The book is also available at Amazon Kindle for \$3.99. Type in the title to find the kindle version.

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Holodick" <rhodick@msn.com>**

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the Wilkes-Barre Area School District**

**A Toxic Board, purchases a Toxic site  
to build a Toxic School**

There are no qualifications to be on a public school board, and there is no compensation. The time commitment is substantial, and the magnitude of responsibility is overwhelming. Criticism is abundant. The operative question follows: "Is there a better way to govern our school districts?"

In this book, you will learn about the actions taken by a democratically elected board of directors whose job it is to manage the affairs of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District on behalf of the public. The people of the district see this as a struggle for safe, enduring, neighborhood schools and with the project underway, they know:

*We can't wait until there are no WB high schools and the tax burden is unsustainable.*

**By**

**Richard A Holodick, Ph.D. &  
Brian W. Kelly, M.B.A**

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Author Brian W. Kelly, MBA

**Two Volume Title:**

**Double Whammy: Incompetence & Corruption in Public School Governance**

**Volume I Of II**

**Book Title: The Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl**

**Book Subtitle: A Story About Toxic Corruption and Tyranny in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District**

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# Prolog

In this book, you will learn about the actions taken by a democratically elected board of directors whose job it is to manage the affairs of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District on behalf of the public.

Unfortunately, in this book and through other sources, you will also learn that though this board was duly elected by the people, they misled the people about their intentions. In fact, they misrepresented themselves by agreeing, if elected, to represent the people and provide for the needs of the students above all else. Renderings of the Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl are shown below:



The story is too big to tell it all, but we tell most of it in this book. We will cite quotations from citizens subject to the board's dictates to

make our point. You will see that this board has chosen to follow what can only be concluded to be a corrupt course of action rather than follow the known wishes of the people of the area, which they serve.



The essence of the issue in dispute is whether perfectly maintainable and well-built and historically relevant neighborhood school structures in the City of Wilkes-Barre should be abandoned, discarded, and torn down so that the board can build its idea of Taj Mahal school on top of a toxic mine dump, in a community outside the major city in the school district. It is rare when a board operates against the best interests of its major municipality. Their callous action has left Wilkes-Barre City (WB) with no high schools from three.

The board has determined that the City which makes up over 60% of the school district simply does not matter. Though it will hurt businesses and property owners in Wilkes-Barre City, the board has remained indifferent to the plight of over 60% of its taxpayers. City taxpayers and officials are expected to give up all of its high schools for this board's potential hazardous folly. For over 100 years, these three WB City High Schools have met the needs of the students and the taxpayers in City high schools named Coughlin, GAR, and Meyers.





The current board clearly has not served its constituents well and has shut the public out of the major decision making. Volume II of this two volume work covers the problems with school district governance. Consider that the caretakers of \$300 million in real estate assets has never had a maintenance plan.

In other words, they had no plan for the upkeep of school buildings for over the past fifty years if ever. They have no qualified staff to provide maintenance work in any of the \$300,000,000 worth of properties, which are “owned” by the school district. Why is this so important?

If the board had the proper team of in-house builders, and maintainers, and a plan for them to do their jobs regularly, keeping the properties maintained, there would not have been a perceived “urgent” need to replace the three historically relevant, well-built high schools in Wilkes- Barre City with an abomination constructed outside the City limits on top of a toxic mine shaft.

The only planning of this “independent” board, over the citizens objections, is to tear down these historical structures because as trustees of district property, they exercised a one-word board maintenance philosophy of neglect, neglect, and neglect, repeated three times for effect.

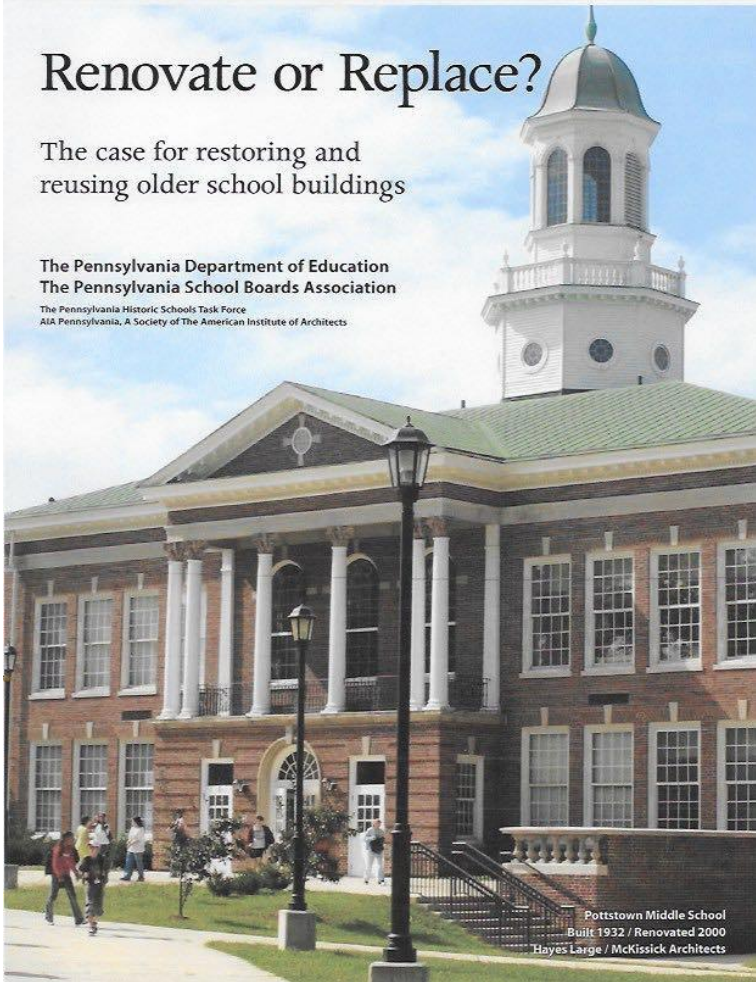
The board failed and they are preparing to fail again. The board’s dream school should not be built because the old is far better than the new. Well-built forever schools should never be replaced. Granite and marble, major ingredients in the three high schools. do not dissipate and decay over time.

# Renovate or Replace?

The case for restoring and reusing older school buildings

The Pennsylvania Department of Education  
The Pennsylvania School Boards Association

The Pennsylvania Historic Schools Task Force  
AIA Pennsylvania, A Society of The American Institute of Architects



It is difficult to understand building new when major authoritative agencies have published for School Districts to renovate, not to rebuild. Here are some of the authorities recommending this strategy:

- The Pennsylvania Department of Education School District's Advisors
- The Pa. School Boards Association
- The Pa. Historical Society support renovations.

Considering the historical society, which finds great historical value in the three WB high schools, think about this. If our esteemed WBA Board had been around two centuries ago, would Independence Hall

have survived? Would the WBASB have torn down Independence Hall and got rid of Philadelphia's most historic structure? I bet they would have.

Writing for Smithsonian Whitey Martinko in December 2017 suggested: "Goodbye Independence Hall, hello Amazon headquarters! He noted that The parody website *onion* had lampooned Philadelphia's eagerness to house Amazon's second command center and included an image of the city leveled to make way for this new business.

Nobody knows what the real motivations were for the board to abandon Wilkes-Barre, but at least it was not for Amazon. Most think it was worse—corruption and greed, plus there was a particular superintendent whose pride was hurt when the SOS group beat him on the Washington Street Zoning.

Whatever the reason, the WBA Board made a dumb decision. It is a mistake the people of the area will be paying for, until they find their graves. Thankfully WBA's board did not get a vote on Independence Hall or it too would be gone along with Coughlin, GAR, and Meyers high schools.

Should a major city face neighborhood blight by removing three major reasons for people to live there. Besides the folly of the idea itself, the site they picked is toxic. No kidding! There ought to be a law. Maybe there is and the Save our Schools (SOS) group is looking for it.

Despite grave warnings of children and staff potentially getting sick on toxic waste from the new school site, this board chose to place the health of students at risk. What esteemed body working for the public good would subject those learning or working at Mine Shaft High in Little Chernobyl from the toxic material, toxic water, and toxic fumes from the designed school built on top of a hazardous waste dump.

More and more citizens of the WB Area believe we were duped into believing the words of the Consigliere that putting poor Wilkes-Barre Area citizens in debt up to a half billion or more dollars after the

State's contribution, was the only solution to having children well-educated in this area. Soon the foreclosure teams from the county and other taxing bodies will be coming for all the properties of the elderly who will not be able to pay the massive taxes required for the board's Taj Mahal. Citizens of WB Area, there is no need for this monstrosity. SOS is trying to find a law and we could use your help.

# Dedication

*This book is dedicated to the long-suffering citizens of Wilkes-Barre Area, having endured the tyranny of their elected self-centered school board for far too long*

In this endeavor, your authors, Richard A. Holodick and Brian W. Kelly are individual members of the Save Our Schools Group. They are serving in this publishing endeavor as instruments of public awareness.

This book is a private work product of Dr. Holodick & Mr. Kelly and was not commissioned by or sponsored by the Save Our Schools Committee.

You and your friends may download this Volume I of the book at no charge for three months after its availability.

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# Acknowledgments

## **The Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl:**

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### **A toxic board, purchases a toxic site to build a Toxic School**

Please don't forget that first and foremost nearly all evidence says don't consolidate schools because it harms academics, student sense of well-being, student participation, and that it increases costs. Having said that, the building site is receiving such attention because outside of perhaps Chernobyl, it would be difficult to find a worse spot to build a school.

Dr. Holodick and Mr. Kelly would like to publicly acknowledged all of the help that we have received from many sources. Certain chapters and parts of this book are written by other authors and are cited in place.





# Preface

Unfortunately for the citizens of Wilkes-Barre Area, our school board, which was elected in good faith by the citizens, believes it was elected to hold office so it could serve its own selfish agenda. The members have chosen to disregard the will of the people. They do not believe in the precepts brought forth by the founders. Instead they have made their governance all powerful instead of being subservient to the people as it is written in law. Board members almost vehemently object to being referred to a corrupt. Whether the WBASB is a corrupt enterprise is a matter of opinion. This book will present facts to help you make the decision for yourself.

We have researched the Roslyn School District so that we would know what school district corruption looks like and what it smells like. There are those in Wilkes-Barre Area who think it looks like this school district and the WBA School District has a smell that suggests it is not 100% clean.

Back in 2019, on a weekend later in that year, HBO released its story of “Bad Education.” This film was led by Hugh Jackman-and just as if it were a story about the Wilkes-Barre Area School District (WBASD), it is about a real life school district and a serious school board scandal involving a lot of money. It took place about two decades ago in a place very unlike WBASD in that it is an affluent suburb of Long Island.

In the movie Frank Tassone, the Superintendent played by Jackman is portrayed as a successful, charismatic superintendent of the Roslyn School District in Roslyn, New York. He was loved and trusted much like some of the characters in our WBASD story.

The difference is that in his role as top dog, Tassone goes on to steal \$11.2 million from the school budget with his associate Pamela Gluckin. In Bad Education, Gluckin is played by Oscar winner Allison Janney). This turns out to be a story about the largest public school embezzlement in U.S. history. Of course folks, the WBASD story has really not yet been fully told.

Though our story and their story both smell bad and are a lot alike in many ways, there is no loot that has been found stashed in any of the story characters homes or school lockers or bank accounts. Some observers of Wilkes-Barre Area Officials and the Board may add a key word to this summary: “YET!”

The Founders knew that even the great Constitution they wrote might not be enough to keep knaves and scoundrels from subverting their work. We see the personification of everything the bad notions from which the Founders attempted to protect us in the current Wilkes-Barre Area School Board. I wish it were different but it is what it is.

Here we are 230+ years after the Constitution was ratified. All is not perfect in America, nor is it perfect in the burgs and cities and towns that make up the individual parts of America. Nonetheless, the principles of the Constitution are so sound and so powerful that even a knave politician cannot bring our country or any municipality down—even though they may try. Eventually, like Frank Tassone they get caught.

Our tyrannical school board cannot and will not stand. The people will prevail. Voting every two years for new board members, the people will have another opportunity to win back control of their school board next year. Vote in the SOS slate of candidates who are in place for the people—and that says it all.

We have all learned from our recent experience that there are far too many politicians who today control the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board (WBASB). Their mission is to overthrow the will of the people and impose their will upon us. You will learn about them in this two-volume book. The big concern in Wilkes-Barre Area, of course is that if we don't smarten up, things can and will get a lot worse. Nobody expects a school board dictatorship amidst a democracy / republic. I suspect that is why you are reading this book.

Your intention no doubt in learning about the issues of the people v the WBASB has to do with how the people who knowingly voted in these candidates and officials, who now rule by tyranny, can come up with a solution to minimize the great power that they gave away to

these knaves in past elections. We can do it unless we give up! Let's not give up!

By choosing to read this book, you have decided that you want to understand why what is happening regarding this area of the country is happening. Thank you. That is why Richard Holodick and Brian Kelly wrote this book and why the members of the SOS team are so glad that we all may eventually understand what is happening.

Holodick and Kelly wrote this book so that the people of Wilkes-Barre Area can know the stakes of having an incompetent and incorrigible board in office. They wrote this book so that the people will always be able to make the correct decisions on representation in the future. Thank you for reading this book.

For anybody else out there who can help us make this right, we will accept your help. For example we would welcome help from Erin Brockavich, who knows how to win against powerful forces of evil. We would be glad to accept help from Mike Makowski, who wrote the screen play for *Bad Education*. We'd also accept support from Hugh Jackman, Ray Romano, and Allison Janney, and Welker White, the actors and actresses who starred in *Bad Education*. Their experience taught them a lot and we need their help.

Wilkes-Barre Area needs a great screen play from Makowski and great actors and actresses to represent our area in its fight against tyranny. And, of course we could use a dose of the gristle and the guts of the real Erin Brockovich whose picture is shown on the next page.



You are going to love the rest of this book since it is designed by two Americans for the Americans who are living in the Wilkes-Barre Area. Few books are a must-read but *Little Chenobyl* is destined to quickly appear at the top of Northeastern Pennsylvania's and the nations most read list.

Sincerely,

Brian P. Kelly, Editor in Chief  
on behalf of Authors Richard  
Holodick and Brian Kelly

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# About the Author, Richard Holodick



Dr. Richard A Holodick is president of Save Our Schools. This group was formed to oppose the consolidation of high schools in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. Holodick, 83, is a 1956 graduate of Wilkes-Barre's Meyers High School. He retired from a lengthy career as an educator in 2001 and he lives in Wilkes-Barre.

Holodick was an effective leader for over 30 years in four states. At one point, Dr. Holodick was an assistant superintendent and superintendent, with 40,000 students and 5,000 employees. One of the board members who served with him is E. Elaine Schuster, an attorney. She wrote the following in praise of Dr. Holodick:

Following a national search, Thomas Payzant, former Assistant U.S. Secretary of Education, who had served as the superintendent of the Oklahoma City School District recommended Dr. Richard A. Holodick to work as his assistant in the K-12 city school district. Dr. Holodick's unique assignment was to create a new school district, researching program offerings, recruiting, interviewing and recommending for hire all employees from the administration,

teachers, maintenance and custodial staff. Holodick developed all policies and procedures for the district. He was responsible for working with the State Department of Education, community, and an architect and to plan a new vocational-technical center. Thirty years have passed, and the Metro Tech School has become a state and national model.

Richard A. Holodick has degrees from Temple, Penn State, and Colorado State. He was a consultant on the science building expansion at Misericordia University. He participated as a consultant, writing the educational and equipment specifications for the High Technology Center at Luzerne County Community College. He was a consultant on the Racine, Wisconsin school district master curriculum/facility plan. He contracted with the Pittsburgh school district's expansion project for the Perry Traditional Academy. He has consulted for corporations, colleges and universities. Of significance are his untiring efforts on behalf of the Wilkes-Barre **Area** School District for the past 20 years, serving for four years as the president of Save Our Schools. Everybody for whom Dr. Holodick worked has high praise for him. The bottom line on Dr. Richard Holodick is extreme competence.

He served as assistant superintendent and a superintendent in major school districts. He was an Associate Dean at Aims Community College and a full-time project director at Penn State Main campus. He served as the Director of Education for the State Correctional Institution at Dallas Pa. He served as an Educational consultant with accolades for the Paullin Group Inc., an international curriculum/facility master planning firm.

In his early years, he got his start as a Construction Electrician with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, IBEW, Local 163. While on his mission to be a Ph.D, he achieved a BS degree, a master's degree and he received his Ph.D. in School Administration. He served as an electrical construction teacher, cooperative education coordinator, intermediate unit executive director, high school principal, and a school superintendent.

To say it again, the bottom line on Dr. Richard Holodick is extreme competence.



# About the Author, Brian W. Kelly



Brian W. Kelly has a B.S. in Data Processing / Computer Science and an MBA in Accounting and Finance. He retired as an Assistant Professor in the Business Information Technology (BIT) program at Marywood University, where he also served as the IBM i and midrange systems technical advisor to the IT faculty. Kelly designed, developed, and taught many college and professional courses. He is a contributing technical editor to a number of IT industry magazines. On the patriotic side, you can find many of Kelly's articles on [www.brianwkelly.com](http://www.brianwkelly.com). He is a major author for Lets Go Publish! – [www.letsGOPublish.com](http://www.letsGOPublish.com)

Kelly is a former IBM Senior Systems Engineer and in his post technical career, he has been a candidate for US Congress and the US Senate from Pennsylvania. He also ran for Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. Not being a politician, Brian learned from his losses that it is very difficult to fight the machine,

Kelly has an active information technology consultancy. He is the author of 260 books and numerous articles. Ask Brian to speak at your next rally! You would enjoy his frank perspectives! Over the past twenty five years, Brian has become the most published non-fiction author in America and one of America's most outspoken and eloquent conservative / nationalist protagonists. Brian loves America. Besides *The Electoral College 4 Dummies*, Kelly is also the author of many other patriotic books. Check them out at [www.Amazon.com/author/brianwkelly](http://www.Amazon.com/author/brianwkelly), Kindle, Barnes & Noble and other fine online booksellers.



# Plot Preview

The SOS Group has been fighting the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board (WBASB) hoping to gain a decision to turn around the notion of eliminating all three historically relevant high schools in Wilkes-Barre City. Though it is late in the game with the building construction continuing, residents of WBA have never given up the fight. “What’s bad is bad and time will only make it worse.” The Big Toxic School is bad and the situation is getting worse but we are better with a late solution than none at all.

Dr. Richard Holodick, and Brian W. Kelly are writing this book to help the board know the right thing to do and then to do the right thing. Holodick and Kelly want to “keep the idea alive that it is not good to risk the health of teenagers by sending the children of Wilkes-Barre Area to a Toxic School.” Across the country such practices are banned because building over toxic waste has been proven to be unsafe and very dangerous for the public’s health, especially the young school students.

There are a few battles going on, all of which are important to the residents and taxpayers of the District. First of all WB Area is a poverty district and cannot afford the Taj Mahal school which is expected to cost about a half billion dollars over forty years. Wilkes-Barre City, with a declining population to begin, will lose its remaining population and will no longer be able to attract industry as its three high schools are eliminated and demolished. What businesses would be attracted with pictures and accounts of a wrecking ball tearing down the only high schools. Businesses look to cities where there is a construction crane signifying business activity.

Moreover, the possibility of neighborhood schools and community-based learning, the preferred vehicle in the modern era is eliminated 100% with the movement to a huge consolidated school in which no child is important. Additionally and probably the worst of all situations is that the project site as you will learn was selected more to spite Wilkes-Barre and rushed through without the necessary precautions for the safety of the children, faculty and staff who will breathe the air in the Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl.

Dr. Mark Schiowitz is a practicing surgeon and an active member of the Save Our Schools group. He is very familiar with the operations of the WBASB. Schiowitz and the SOS group seek the best and safest education outcomes for the students in the WB Area. Mark’s unique background and propensity to perform major research for the group have prompted him to

write the board numerous times asking them to reverse their decision on building on a toxic site. He has labled the site Little Chernobyl with good reason. Who would want to send their precious children to such a school on such a site.

One of the best ways to begin this book is by printing below Mark's latest essay. He and many in Wilkes-Barre Area believe strongly that the worst days of the Big Toxic School are yet to come and if we all can prevent the danger to our children, all residents would be better for it. Yes, it is better for the Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl to remain vacant even after it is completed rather than have the children suffer major health problems. And so, we present Mark Schiowitz's latest essay titled:

## Little Chernobyl

*A School District's Dance around Educational, Health, and Environmental Principles*

*by Dr. Mark Schiowitz*



**Dr. Mark Schiowitz, MD** is a Critical Care Surgery Specialist in Wilkes Barre, PA and has over 42 years of experience in the medical field. He graduated from Thomas Jefferson U, Medical College **medical school** in 1978. He is affiliated with WB General Hospital.

When all educational, student well-being, and cost data concerning high school size, configuration, and consolidation suggested a path of de-centralized renovated high schools, a Northeastern Pennsylvania school district opted for new construction, consolidation, and of course, 6A football, choosing a path worthy of 1970. No high school will remain in Wilkes-Barre City, the impoverished district hub and county seat.

The criminal genius of this plan revolves around Little Chernobyl, where the mega-school is to be built:

Adjacent district constituent, Plains Township, hosts a little 80 acre moonscape, unwanted and fallow for ten years. It had been deep-mined for anthracite for a century, strip-mined, and then became a site for dumping coal ash, the carcinogenic, toxic product of coal or coal waste burned for electricity. Such a site is illegal in five states, discouraged in 25 others and disparaged by EPA and other expert entities on school siting.

Multiple soil borings also demonstrated arsenic levels above maximum allowable residential levels. Hexavalent chromium has been inadequately assessed, and radioactivity, known to exist in eastern coal ash was never checked. Previous assays of contaminated groundwater were ignored. Planned environmental remediation by capping could render arsenic more toxic and enhance toxin leaching. The Southern Environmental Law Center avers that capping doesn't work, and the Carolinas now prohibit cap in place at coal ash landfills and ponds.

Pennsylvania's mining-friendly DEP was not too concerned, just citing a moderate risk of subsidence. DEP side-stepped most health issues, basking in credit for the anticipated land reclamation, while Environmental Integrity Project labeled the site "unprecedented" and "dangerous." In another twist, by state law, coal ash deposition for so called beneficial use, is prohibited within 900 feet of a school. At a December 2019 EPA coal ash hearing in Arlington, those assembled, aware of the damage in their own communities, were appalled by a site photo of this land scar and this building plan.

The newly appointed district football coach, a Plains Township commissioner, was available to smooth the project path. The superintendent's father-in law, though ostensibly representing the city in the legislature, was in awe of the site's "potential:" As compaction proceeded and fugitive dust spewed over unprotected workers, the district had to import actual soil for "groundbreaking," Somehow, the proactive administration, board majority, and local pols could see this land's value and beauty through blackened chunks of flammable culm visible for 1000 meters in each direction.

So essential was this deal, the district forked over \$4.2 million to a mining company with mob roots for a property maximally assessed at \$800,000. The solicitor spins that to take possession of this jewel by eminent domain at assessed value, would precipitate a lawsuit over mineral rights, this on property the mining company had previously deemed "depleted." The initial deed retained mineral rights for the company. Taken to Magistrate's Court by a property owner, several days later, the solicitor produced a second deed with the school district assigned mineral rights, after all. In addition to the burgeoning cost of construction, infrastructure and access roads, Wilkes-Barre Area inherited obligations to create sidewalks on nearby Plains Township streets, and to enlarge a nearby expressway entrance.

Prior to taking possession of the site, a district consultant, which conveniently leased adjacent land from the coal company, began dynamic compaction, a cost-effective way to attempt ground stabilization for construction. Knowing opposition groups were trying to halt the project at the state level, the district increased its pace. In fact, the Federal Office of Surface Mining, confided that they were unaware of any previous situation where mining land was purchased prior to its reclamation by the mining company, yet here was Wilkes-Barre Area doing the coal company's reclamation work at public expense.

Speaking of the Feds, the district maintained the mining license until construction was well under way. That excluded EPA, the only federal agency with a coal ash rule, also the agency charged with protecting the Susquehanna River (the Chesapeake's largest tributary) 300 meters away. EPA has no jurisdiction on mining land. When construction was well under way, the mining license was transferred

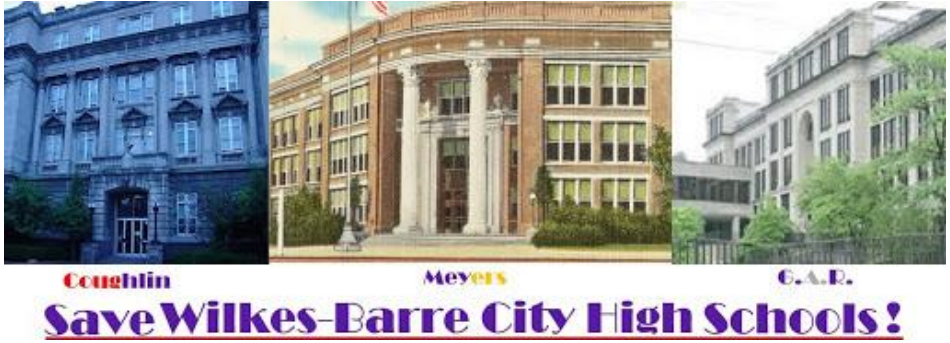
to an adjacent bit of land the mining company still owns. One can only imagine the environmentally friendly projects these neighbors might hatch.

Those are the broad strokes. Construction continues, the district scrupulously dodging opposition, a Department of Education hearing, and referendum. One can only imagine the canvas a true investigation might paint.





# Chapter 1 Comparing “Infamous” to WBASB Corruption



This is the story about a bad group of people who swore a public oath and then ignored it. The title of this book could very well be The Bad School Board. When you finish this book, I predict you will be convinced when they did their worst deeds against the students, community, and taxpayers (people), in a word, they were bad. In a community’s struggle for safe, enduring, neighborhood schools you will learn the sordid details of Wilkes-Barre Area’s corruption, deception, back-breaking taxation, and yes, even tyranny against the people.



## Comparing “Infamous” to WBASB Corruption.

Let me first repeat the above paragraph so you know where your authors are coming from. This is the story about a bad group of people who swore a public oath and then ignored it. The title of this book could very well be The Bad School Board. When you finish this

book, I predict you will be convinced when they did their worst deeds against the students, community, and taxpayers (people), in a word, they were bad. In a community's struggle for safe, enduring, neighborhood schools you will learn the sordid details of Wilkes-Barre Area's corruption, deception, back-breaking taxation, and yes, even tyranny against the people.

It is a story worth telling. It may not be the worst story of corruption you have ever been told but it is bad, bad, bad. You may even say that the story leading up to the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board's Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl beats a lot of other stories such as Bad Education, Kids for Cash, and even Erin Brockovich.

Admittedly, no children have died yet as in the pollution of Hicksville in Erin Brockovich, but the future predictions may make Brockovich's story very likely seem like small potatoes. Luzerne county was the home of Russel Buffalino, mafia crime leader, featured in the film "The Irishman."

Yet, even the WBASB story is not so obviously corrupt enough to beat hands-down the most egregious, corruption true story ever told. Each of these four stories are bad and after you read our story of WBASB in this book, you may agree it almost tops the three cited. That's what I thought too until I looked up the #1 corrupt politician in American History. We give you the story of *Boss Tweed* below to whet your appetite to understand just how corrupt real corruption can be.

This story is not from our area or our era folks, but corruption is corruption and though this story takes us back many years, those who evaluate stories of corruption have slotted the story of *Boss Tweed* as the #1 corruption story of all-time—hands down. To put Wilkes-Barre Area and the others in perspective, please let us share with you some of the *Boss Tweed* story. You'll enjoy the story and I think you'll agree with the conclusion.

Going back a lot further in time we eventually find the most corrupt politician who ever lived. That folks would be his BOSSINESS himself, the one and only BOSS TWEED. The best part of this story is that Boss Tweed was never a superintendent of schools and he had

nothing to do with any school district and he had nothing to do with kids. But, like WBA school directors, such as some who have already put their time in the Big House and etched their names permanently on the prison walls, the BOSS MAN was a phenomenon and phenomenally greedy politician.

The famous Caricaturist and Editorial Cartoonist Thomas Nast's drawings for Harper's Weekly were instrumental in the downfall of Boss Tweed, the powerful Tammany Hall leader. See below pic.



Nast depicts the Tweed Ring: "Who stole the people's money?" / "Twas him." From left to right: William Tweed, Peter B. Sweeny, Richard B. Connolly, and Oakey Hall. To the left of Tweed in the background are James H. Ingersoll and Andrew Garvey, city contractors involved with much of the city construction.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, the undisputed poster child for graft and greed in American politics is not Louis Elmy, Brian Dunn, Frank Pizzella, or Jim Height. Despite how low these four went, they did not come close to the BOSS MAN. It is none of these. These four sure pulled their own weight in the sleaze period of Wilkes-Barre Area School Board politics but they were not heralded as the best. Not hardly! It was none other than William "Boss" Tweed, who was the best at his game. He raised corruption to an art form.

As a member of New York's Tammany Hall, Tweed and his cronies, including Mayor Fernando Wood, ran New York during the Civil War era in the late 1800's, as if it were their own private money factory. That's not to say the four from WBASB would not have admired the BOSS.

My best example of his obvious penchant for corruption is that Tweed once used personal funds to buy 300 benches for \$5 each, then he sold them to the city for \$600 a pop. And that's just the tip of it. Tweed had no toxic mine sites in his inventory or so we are told. And, so perhaps the corrupt WBA Directors had more room for problems.

The pundits characterized the building of New York City Hall as a clinic itself in graft: The city paid a steep price for every item purchased—such as being charged \$7500 for every thermometer, \$41,190 for each broom, and \$5.7 million for furniture and carpets. One carpenter even received almost \$361,000 for a single month's work. Kickbacks and corruption were the order of the day.

And although he was crooked as a dog's hind leg, Tweed does get a bit of credit from some historians for undertaking many important projects that improved life in New York (albeit at enormous financial gain to himself). Tweed's illicit profits were said to be in the range of \$200 million, and that was in the 1860s! The law eventually caught up with the Boss, though, and he died in prison in 1878.

To get you thinking of corruption and graft regarding the Wilkes-Barre School Board, please permit me to cite a few further exposes on the model politicians who have served on the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board.

Here is one from gort42, a local, quite famous Pennsylvania blogger: Back in 2012, this blogger, known in NEPA as gort42 wrote a political commentary about the WBASB. Board Presidents from around that time were Pizzella and Elmy and there were a few bad guys on the board known as Dunn from the Dunn Deal and another was the President, Jim Height.

The Gort42 blogger pulled no punches about the board corruption. This is a sample of what the people think of the corrupt school board. The low opinion has prevailed for years and with good reason.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2012 Wilkes-Barre Area School Board

The reorganization meeting of the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board was anything but organized according to the story by Peter Cameron in the Citizens Voice with 2 breaks for executive sessions and Christine Katsock calling the meeting illegal.

Former Coughlin HS teacher and sports coach John Quinn was elected President and Louis Elmy as VP. The Secret Service was interested in Quinn's son a few months ago according to the TL. [Maybe nobody on the board is clean because of paternalism and cronyism and favoritism.]

You must wonder who would even want the job of school director in Wilkes-Barre. It doesn't pay anything, and you get a lot of grief in the local papers after you hire a relative for a position. Or maybe that's it. [Maybe that is pay enough because nobody else gets that pay.]

This is a body that has seen 3 members convicted of corruption. Jim Height, Brian Dunn and Frank Pizzella. After Pizzella was indicted he was elected as board President with the support of former reformer board member Christine Katsock.

If there is any government body in Luzerne County that needs to change its public persona it's this one (WBA board) but that doesn't seem to faze this bunch of [corrupts] much. They made a hash of hiring a new superintendent and the new hiring policy is a joke.

[They hired a novice for top dollar—his dad had been a former board member, father-in-law a state representative.]

Four seats are up in the upcoming election in May 2013. The incumbents are Christine Katsock, Lynn Evans, Phil Latinski

and Bob Corcoran. I haven't heard if any of them will seek reelection.

Katsock ran for many offices as a Republican reformer before she finally got a spot on the school board. She came within 800 votes of defeating Wilkes-Barre Mayor Tom Leighton in 2003 and gave State Rep Eddie Day Pashinski a run for his money in 2006. [She understands voting levers.]

She switched to the Democrats when she ran for the board and had no comment when asked to explain her vote for Pizzella but it's not hard to figure out if you look at her Campaign Finance Report. Frank Pizzella was her top cash contributor pitching in \$3000. She also got \$1800 as an in-kind contribution from the Friends of Frank Pizzella.

Evans voted against Pizzella and the new super and revealed the pick system of filling jobs.

Latinski goes along.

Bob Corcoran has other troubles. Update: Corcoran barred from home, contact with son

Pure Bunkum has a couple of insightful posts about this subject. I think we should get rid of school boards and KeystonePolitics proposes putting the Intermediate Units in charge.

## **Compare WBASB with Boss Tweed**

When you finish this book, you won't be seeing Boss Tweed as a saint but you will be made aware that corruption is not just found in major US cities. Corruption has been around longer than most humans.

Folks, please remember that there were four members (3 presidents) of the WBASB who faced political corruption charges over the years. It's tough to grab all their names at once but here they are:



**Former Board Presidents**

May 18 2009 Jim Height  
Sept 15 2009 Frank Pizzella  
Apr 7 2016 Lou Elmy

**Former member**

Oct 7, 2010 Brian Dunn 2009

Boss Tweed never worked in Wilkes-Barre but he could have and he would have thrived.

A New Year’s Day wish for the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board (WBASB) at one point could have been to have no School board Presidents or members indicted in the following year. Now, with the potential for additional discovered corruption in the Big Toxic School consolidation project (soon to be a scandal) at the Little Chernobyl site, the 2021 wish list may very well be a wish not to have all six members who voted for “Big Toxic,” including the president,

indicted for fraud on the project. Few who are paying attention would be surprised if it came to that



## Chapter 2 The Purpose of this Book?



In this chapter, we examine the multitude of errors and omissions by the WBASB, factoring in the fact that the only requirement to be on the board is residency, and members don't even need a high school diploma. We must conclude that the election success is dependent on popularity, connections and wallet size. This raises the question: "Is this the best method of governing our school districts across the state if not the nation?" In Volume II we cover the governance of WBASD. Hang on for a lot of great learning.

If the WBA School Board, were perfect, please know that Richard Holodick and Brian Kelly would not have had to write this book. There would have been no need for it. You are reading this book right now, because this board is far from perfect. In fact, it is fatally flawed, and a product of an organizational structure that produces the kind of officials we get. Neither the organization or the new board members benefit by their mistakes.

Why can't the board get it right? Maybe if we are to be charitable we can say that maybe they don't know how to do things right. There are problems in the WBASD and they have been here for some time.

When we attempt to hire the best officials that we can, the reason the board fails is that there are no tests or specific qualifications that must be met to get the job of School Director. And, so the selection process revolves around a lot of Kentucky Windage and perhaps not enough public hot air.

Moreover, in WBA, from history we know that your blood line is one of your most important assets to get a public job. To whom are you related? If that doesn't do it, the next best question is: Who do you know? This does raise the question if this the best method of governing our school districts across the state if not the nation. Volume II is just one book away.

There are problems in the WBASD and they have been here for some time. Pay attention as these things just don't happen when there is good management. The district's student's academic rank statewide is 443rd out of 500 school districts. WBASD has the most students in the state (600) to flee to charter and cyber schools; with the largest number of truancies in the state; so those that don't flee stay home with no easy place to go.

Here are some more statistics about WBA. Over 77% of the students are impoverished. according to parent(s)' income. In light of this, what is the board's plan? The district should consolidate sports meeting the goal of a 6A rank to play at the top level of sports in the state of PA. But does this really help? The board would like to close the three City-based high schools and consolidate them into one school. The school they designed is to be fashioned on an isolated "Little Chernobyl-like site. It is so far from a population area that getting kids to school and home again would take the current 35% bussing rate compared to walkers to 95% of the students being bussed. With an impoverished community, how does \$55,000 a bus sound?

The WBA board members all agreed before deciding to build the Big Toxic school on the isolated Little Chernobyl site that neighborhood schools such as Coughlin, GAR, and Meyers, are the best option. They later claimed that the community tax base could afford three high schools.

Ironically, they decided that to save the taxpayers money they would close the neighborhood schools, move the students them out of the city, reduce varsity sports and extra curricula activities by two thirds. They did not care that the new school location would making parent participation at the school impossible for many. Honest evaluators would deem this totally irresponsible for a number of reasons. First of all, not only is the scholarly research opposed to such decisions. The district's own internal and external task force analyses by their own committees has determined such decisions re poor.

What this says is that despite their own community think tanks such as Save Our Schools, as well as WBASB's own district funded studies and the PFM state sponsored study listing such decisions as a disadvantage, and that is a huge understatement, the board decide to move forward with the Big Toxic School and Little Chernobyl regardless of it being a poor decision.

Many like the idea of a nice new school but nobody wants to pay for it. How about building a new school? The PA. Department of Education, The Pa. School Boards Association, the American Institute of Architects, and the Pa. Historical Society, published a major report, in favor of restoration v building a new school. Nonetheless, WBASB is building a new school without the funding needed to list even one spade full of earth.

There are other issues in the design. For example, at a public board meeting the board was informed that the library in the new school was too small to hold the recommended volumes. So what? That's small potatoes compared with all the anomalies to construction this board had to fight. And, so even this major deficiency was ignored.

At the very next board meeting instead of addressing the library quandary, the board did not resolve it. Instead, they voted to expand the swimming pool two more lanes and improve the school flooring at a cost of a million dollars. The reason for the additional lanes was to qualify hosting competitive events.

Ironically, there was some subsidence on the Little Chernobyl site and thus, due to soil conditions, a deep diving pool was not possible. This fact alone negated the possibility of complete swim events at

Big Toxic High. The district now has an eight lane Olympic size pool to teach senior students to swim.

It should be noted that this poverty level underfunded district already has a swimming pool, with a diving pool, in an elementary school where students actually need to learn to swim. An investigation would show the same scenario with the planned football stadium at Big Toxic High. The district already has a football stadium.



**Picture of the Washington St. consolidated WBASD High School Plan before Big Toxic High. This plan at least did not depend on a site as worthy as Little Chernobyl. Due to zoning it was a failed plan before it was attempted.**

As we know, unfortunately, the big consolidated school is already being constructed on a strip mined, deep mined, coal ash dump, former industrial waste dump that we call Little Chernobyl, with the state cautioning that the site has a history of subsidence. What can make such an unworkable site work. The answer appears to be “nothing.” It surely does not work for me and many others. Would not have the nickname “Little Chernobyl” if it was an actual workable proposition for the people?

## **Here is a facebook post from co-author Dr. Richard Holodick**

Richard Holodick is a Visual Storyteller. He has gathered stats taken from 2014, that would even be more alarming six years later.

The facts have proven that academically, almost all students do better in neighborhood schools. Yet, the board's plan is to close the three neighborhood aka *community-based schools*. In the new consolidated school, these students will need a parent or guardian help to get to this school for extracurricular activities once the district isolates their school.

The Board chooses to ignore the fact that it commands a poverty level district and instead, it chooses to behave as if the district has unlimited funds. This new project they have begun will cost residents that earn an average of \$38,000 a year upwards of a half billion dollars over a forty-year period. This is most discouraging by itself.

Add to this the fact that only a third of the students (2400) will be attending this school. That leaves the other impoverished children (4600) wanting. They will get to attend school in one of five aged elementary schools. If this a fair deal for anybody?

## **The consolidated WBASD High School PLAN**

Even before Big Toxic High, the Wilkes-Barre Area School District, (WBASD) was comprised of 67,000 residents. The residents are listed at the poverty level with an average income of \$40,000 a year. There are 7,000 students in seven neglected aged facilities: the district's # 2 problem.

Problem # 1 is student's failure ranked 443rd out of 501 school districts in Pennsylvania. Just eight years ago the district students were ranked 144th out of 500 school districts.

Problem # 3 is the experienced leadership at the central administrative office, and professional contracted services. The board is highly educated with four retired administrators, a degreed minister of color, but it has been and continues to be dysfunctional. The standard procedures of curriculum/facility long range planning

have been ignored. Expenditures of a half billion dollars over a forty-year period are being wagered on a school for only 2400 students, leaving 4600 in need. For such a huge cost, one could safely label this act as irresponsible.

In a poverty level district, underfunded by \$33 million a year, not doing due diligence to utilize existing facilities, swimming pool and football stadium, no less historic facilities with a potential forever shelf life could easily run the district into educational and financial bankruptcy. The development of a plan to submit to the Pa. Department of Education that segregated the high school with the highest percentage of minorities and economically disadvantaged students constituted possible malfeasance in a public office.

There was once a plan to build a consolidated school for 2400 students on 2.7 acres/ Thirty-five acres is the state recommendation. The building would have been downtown on a one-way narrow street; forbidden by zoning.

The board could not wait to spend taxpayer dollars on this folly by not waiting for zoning waivers and not knowing if it would receive them. It cost the taxpayers \$6 million for the board to get the answer – NO!

This board treats taxpayer dollars like the goose producing golden eggs. Instead of reevaluating its decisions, this board doubles down on poor decision making, ignoring any semblance of an impact study. For example it selected a candidate location (Little Chernobyl) out of 117 square miles of the worst possible isolated, toxic, subsidence prone building site in the area. Need we add the costliest to purchase and prep for building. And in a “Robinhood” gesture the poverty ridden residents paid Pagnotti Enterprise, \$55,000 an acre for land assessed at \$10,000 an acre. Incompetence? Malfeasance? Or what?

We show that this site has the potential of putting children and district employees in harm's way. The topper is that if the mineral rights are worthless (never assessed) the taxpayers paid \$55,000 an acre for land assessed at \$10,000 an acre. Thank God for the board that they see golden eggs. However, the people and the auditors see an impoverished public being stretched beyond their limits to pay

their taxes. They see no gold or a goose and there is no way they can afford the burden being imposed.

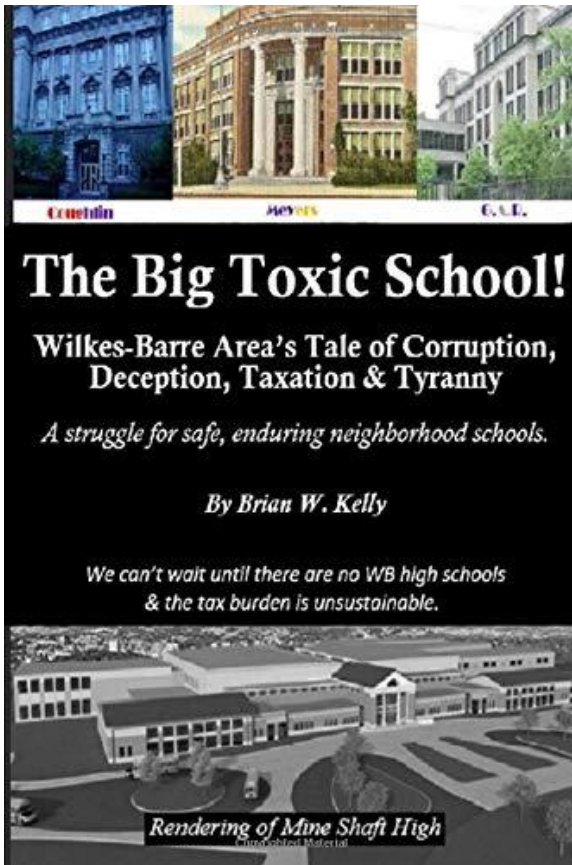
The Save Our Schools Inc. organization members, and legal reps have written complaints to the PDE Secretary of Education, the Auditor General, the Attorney General, the Pa. Inspector General, and the FBI. The deaf ears seem to indicate that the prevailing thought on the area influences even the top people in authority as a toxic school is being tacitly built while Nero fiddles. We don't have to do this to ourselves.





## Chapter 3 Heroes in Unlikely Places

Nationally prominent author Brian Kelly wrote his 202<sup>nd</sup> book on August 11, 2019. With 257 books as of today, Kelly is the most published living non-fiction author in the United States. His book titled *The Big Toxic School* is a tell-all tale about the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board. Yes, folks, it was tough to find enough paper to print all the pages.



A purpose of the book at the time in 2019, was to help the people of the area elect an honest school board. Election day was set for Nov 5, 2019. If the board could not be swept clean then it was hoped that we could at least embarrass the current school board to call off its plan to build an unaffordable multi-million dollar new high school on top of a toxic mine dump (Little Chernobyl).

As the president of *Save Our Schools*, an advocacy group he formed with others to fight the school board's tyranny, President Richard

Holodick had signed off on a subtitle for *The Big Toxic School* as follows. He saw his battle as “Wilkes-Barre Area’s four pronged tale of 1. Corruption, 2. Deception, 3. Taxation & 4. Tyranny.”

Dr. Richard A. Holodick, President of *Save Our Schools*, and co-author is best portrayed by the following Letter to the Editor.

## YOUR VIEW

### An open letter to the Wilkes-Barre Area SB

This is an open letter to the WBA school board's eight members that must select a replacement for Dino Galello.

I have known and worked for and with Richard Holodick for over 20 years in four states.

The following was written by an attorney who we both worked for. He also served as a board member in a school district for 32 years where Holodick served as an assistant superintendent and superintendent.

*"Thomas Payzant, former Assistant U.S. Secretary of Education, served as the superintendent of the Oklahoma City School District.*

*"Following a national search, he recommended*

*Dr. Richard A. Holodick to work as his assistant in the K-12 city school district. Dr. Holodick's unique assignment was to create a new school district, researching program offerings, recruiting, interviewing and recommending for hire all employees from the administration, teachers, maintenance and custodial staff.*

*"He was responsible for working with the State Department of Education, community, and an architect and to plan a new vocational-technical center.*

*Thirty years have passed and the Metro Tech School has become a state model if not national. Thirty years later, we can attest to the fact*

*that we have followed the master plan developed by Dr. Holodick and the many community leaders and advisory groups he recruited and coordinated.*

*"E. Elaine Schuster, Esq."*

His degrees are from Temple, Penn State and Colorado State Universities.

He was a national award winner issued by the United States Department of Education to earn his Ph.D.

Locally, he was a consultant on the science building expansion for the science center at Misericordia University.

He participated as a consultant writing the educational and equipment specifications for

the Advanced Technology Center at Luzerne County Community College, was a consultant on the district-wide Racine, Wisconsin, school district master curriculum/facility plan, and contracted with the Pittsburgh school district's for an expansion project at the Perry Traditional Academy.

His professional activities included national conference presentations. He also has consulted for corporations, colleges and universities. Of significance are his untiring efforts on behalf of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District for the past 15 years and serving for three years as the president of Save Our Schools.

**Robert Paulin**  
Retired president/owner  
The Paulin Group Inc.  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

For Holodick and the Save our Schools group, it has been a long tough battle with more downs than ups in engaging a board that would not fight fairly. The board thinks it has won as the Big Toxic School is in the process of being built on a mountain in Plains Twp (Little Chernobyl).

Meanwhile, Wilkes-Barre City, with its three high schools set for demolition, is the biggest city in the area. It will be left with no high schools. But Save our Schools and its President Richard Holodick have not given up the fight. There is still much war to raise and this two-volume book about our plight and our just deserve to win is going to position us for a victory march.

Dr. Holodick adds "The news media in the Wilkes-Barre are acts as if it represents another school district. They have suggested that SOS back off the opposition and support the new school as it is now nearly half complete. If the issue was that the consolidation was academically stupid, SOS may even "stand down." But it is a very toxic site, subsidence prone, and the district is depending on DEP to ensure the safety of our children. This is the agency presently under

investigation by a Pa. Grand Jury for not monitoring the fracking industry.

It is a downright scary scenario when the recently reelected Attorney General publicly states that it appears that DEP monitoring is dependent on the size of the wallet or connections. Not kidding!

Five other states forbid building a public school NEAR a contaminated site. What is wrong with Pennsylvania Officials? We build directly on top of a contaminated site—*Little Chernobyl*. . No public school has ever been built on a site with this many drawbacks. No school district has paid five times the lowest assessed value for a dump. Surely there is corruption involved. Can there be no investigations at the state level or federal level because there are some favorites who might get upset?

The Save our Schools (SOS) Group is the major opponent of the construction of a new \$121 million high school in Plains Township. With all other expenses, local taxpayers fear a \$ half billion-dollar tab over 40 years.

On election day, 2019, the group started with strong odds that SOS would find at least two new members sympathetic to their cause on the board this past December (2019). That did happen as we needed two more to gain a majority.

Two write-in candidates, Jody Bush and Debra Formola, if elected in a long shot would have given SOS a 5-4 board majority but write-ins are tough to win in Pennsylvania. We'll win next year when Jody and Debra are able to run as full party candidates. It should be noted that Busch and Formola broke all records with the number of votes they did garner.

Former district school psychologist Beth Ann Owens-Harris got the most votes with 5,062, while Terry Schiowitz was third with 4,784. All three incumbents supported the building of the Big Toxic School and were reelected. Along with Rev. Shawn Walker, Mark Atherton came in second and John Quinn came in fourth. Walker ran only on the Democratic ticket. SOS is convinced that because of the corruption, deception, future unaffordable taxation, and the tyranny

of the board against the people, they can stop the building project before the next election and protect the taxpayers from fiscal and educational bankruptcy.

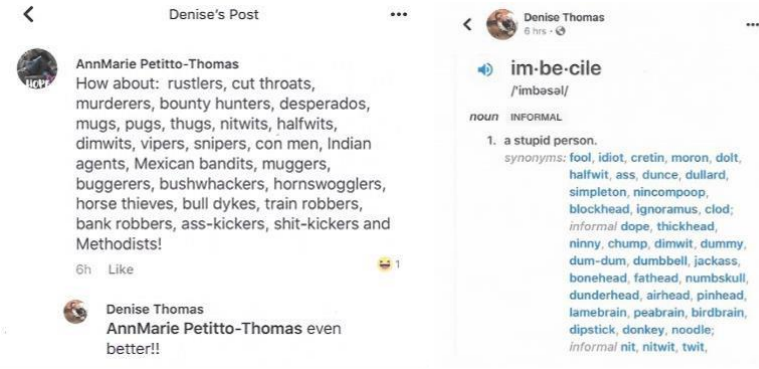
The group is seeking help from the PA Auditor General, the Attorney General, and the U.S. Department of the Interior who is looking into Pa. DEP. There are many facets of the project activity so far that do not pass the smell test. We'll tell you about these in this book.

It would be a great thing for our officials at all levels to join together to protect the taxpayers from fiscal and educational bankruptcy and to safeguard the health and safety of the students and employees forced to spend time at this toxic school site, aka "*Little Chernobyl*".

### **Taking on the Bad Guys in Wilkes-Barre**

The gristly Richard Holodick is a never-say-die leader who was encouraged by the success of Erin Brockovich in taking on the big guys in a chemical case and winning. Holodick thinks that the people of the Wilkes-Barre Area in Pennsylvania can also beat the big guys with all their political connections even though the area is still fraught with the same level of nepotism and cronyism—still rampant despite the famous kids for cash convictions.

It appears evident that the board does not fear the FBI when they charged a board member and the board elected him president after the indictment. It appears that bad behavior such as racist beliefs, posted on Face Book, or level of education / experience matter because this member was elected president and most recently vice president.



The "kids for cash" scandal was a tough victory for the area yet, justice prevailed eventually. It centered on judicial kickbacks to two judges at the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Here are the salient aspects of the case:

### Criminal verdicts and sentences



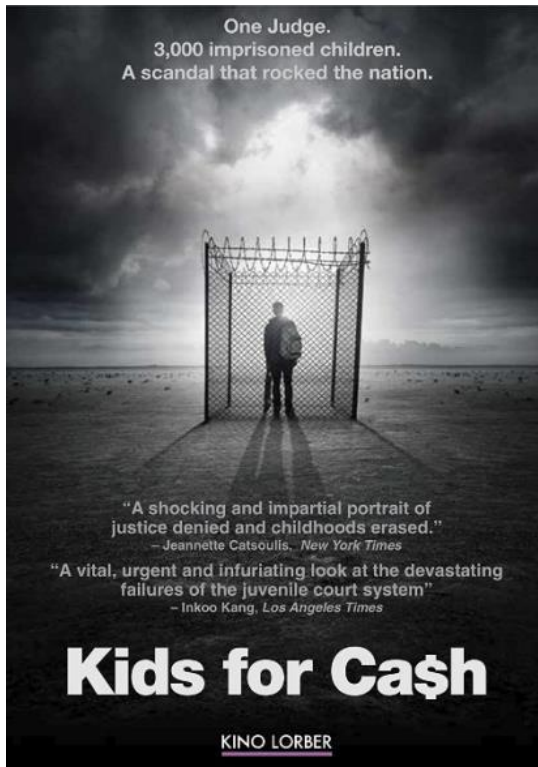
Judge Ciavarella, left; Judge Conahan, right

On February 18, 2011, following a trial, a federal jury convicted Ciavarella on 12 of the 39 remaining counts he faced including racketeering, a crime in which prosecutors said the former judge used children "as pawns to enrich himself." In convicting Ciavarella of racketeering, the jury agreed with prosecutors that he and Conahan had taken an illegal payment of nearly \$1 million from a youth center's builder, then hid the money.

The panel of six men and six women also found Ciavarella guilty of "honest services mail fraud" and of being a tax cheat, for failing to list

that money and more on his annual public financial-disclosure forms and on four years of tax returns. In addition, they found him guilty of conspiring to launder money.

The jurors acquitted Ciavarella of extortion and bribery in connection with \$1.9 million that prosecutors said the judges extracted from the builder and owner of two youth centers, including allegations that Ciavarella shared the proceeds of FedEx boxes that were stuffed with tens of thousands of dollars in cash.



Wilkes-Barre Area School District has its own sordid past with three top officials on the board having been convicted to hard jail time. The Brockovich case and the “kids for cash” case have buoyed Holodick and the SOS group in their belief that it ain’t over until it is over.

## Chapter 4 Bad Education & The WBA School Board



Dr. Richard Holodick, President of the Save Our Schools Group is passionate about the School District operating on the up and up. Right now, to many of the residents of the Wilkes-Barre Area, this is not the case. It may not be as bad as the Boss Tweed corruption, but the minutes of board meetings have the same smell as corruption as the Tweed administration, if you know what I mean. Things are so wrong, they just smell bad.

Just a month after the release of *The Big Toxic School* book, and about eight years after the Conahan / Ciavarella Kids for Cash corruption debacle, a new movie called *Bad Education* made its world premiere on September 8, 2019 at the Toronto International Film Festival.

Brian Kelly, my co-author and editor is convinced that if he and I can explain the corruption in the movie *Bad Education*, it will be easier for us to demonstrate the corruption that has been all too prevalent in the Wilkes-Barre School Board over the past twenty years--especially in the more recent *Superintendent Brian Costello* years. So, hang on, after we tell you about *Bad Education*, we'll make the connection, and it will make a lot of sense. We are counting on you being convinced long before you finish reading the two volumes of this book.

Though there is not a lot of obvious sex and intrigue in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District's saga, there are some juicy stories and what appears to be a ton of wrongdoing. If there is money hidden

from the books and we think there is in WBASB, we have yet to find it but other than pure incompetence, nothing explains the shenanigans we uncovered more than some stashed away loot.

Dr. Richard Holodick immediately saw the connection between the two school districts. We'll get to that right here. The Roslyn School district has gone down as the location in which the largest scandal ever in US School districts took place. The film *Bad Education* memorializes the events of the corrupt happenings that cost Roslyn \$11.2 million from the school budget.

Holodick sees the potential malfeasance and misfeasance of the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board as deserving of similar punishment. Holodick has found at least six million dollars of lost funds in WBASD related just to the Washington Street debacle.

The Save our Schools Group would like nothing more than to take the WBASD (Wilkes-Barre Area School District) to court to remove the board and have the state stop the Big Toxic School in its tracks. However, in a word, they can't because of one big word – MONEY. SOS simply does not have the money. The group would need a lot more funds than what is available in its budget to pay for the litigation needed.

Replacing the board next time around looks like a sure thing but the school building expenses will all be sunk costs by then and few businesses would want to buy a school built on a toxic mine shaft to run their organizations. Nonetheless, the film *Bad Education* offers hope that the WBASD real life scandal can be resolved in the taxpayers' favor and some prior beneficiaries may be located to fund making Wilkes- Barre School District whole again without its Big Toxic School.

Holodick would like to find a Hugh Jackman-like male lead and an Allison Janney female lead who would like to take a movie production cast on to similar success as *Bad Education*. The proceeds and the publicity for the WBASD taxpayers would go a long way in fighting the rigged WBASD system.

As we discussed briefly, over a September 2019 weekend, HBO released *Bad Education*. This was a Hugh Jackman-led film about a



real-life school scandal that took place nearly two decades ago in an affluent suburb of Long Island. Please indulge me as I tell the story and give us 'til later to make the connection between the two sets of corruption. Bad Education gives us some ideas a great screenwriter can use to create a great screen play from this, similar to the work in the movie Bad Education.



Bad Education memorializes the events of the corrupt shenanigans that cost Roslyn \$11.2 million from the school budget. Is the potential malfeasance and misfeasance of the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board deserving of similar punishment.

**Malfeasance in office, or official misconduct**, is the commission of an *unlawful* act, done in an official capacity, that affects the performance of official duties. Malfeasance in office is often grounds for a *just cause* removal of an elected official by *statute* or *recall election*. <sup>[citation needed]</sup> Malfeasance in office contrasts with "misfeasance in office", which is the commission of a *lawful* act, done in an official capacity, that improperly causes harm; and "nonfeasance in office," which is the failure to perform an official duty.

# Chapter 5 Historical Overview of Wilkes-Barre City



Wilkes-Barre City Aerial View

Wilkes-Barre is the 18<sup>th</sup> largest city in Pennsylvania and it serves as the county seat of Luzerne County. With a population of 321, 423 Luzerne County is the 12<sup>th</sup> largest county in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in which there are 67 counties in total. There are two other names for the way the population including Wilkes-Barre is grouped. Both the Statistical Area and the Wyoming Valley refer to the same city groups.

Wilkes-Barre is one of the principal cities in what is known as the *Scranton–Wilkes-Barre–Hazleton, PA Metropolitan Statistical Area*. Located at the center of the Wyoming Valley, which is also a pseudonym. Often abbreviated as WB, it is second in size to the nearby city of Scranton. The Scranton–Wilkes-Barre–Hazleton, PA Metropolitan Statistical Area had a population of 563,631 as of the 2010 Census, making it the fourth-largest metro/statistical area in the state of Pennsylvania. Therefore the population of the Wyoming Valley is also 563,631 since they refer to the same population.



South Main Street Wilkes-Barre City—Years Ago!

The Wyoming Valley is a historic industrialized region of Northeastern Pennsylvania. As we will discuss in this book, it was once famous for fueling the industrial revolution in the United States with its many anthracite coal mines. As noted as a metropolitan area, it is known as the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre metropolitan area, after its principal cities, Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, and it is the 101st-largest metropolitan area in the United States and the 4th largest in Pennsylvania.

Wilkes-Barre and the surrounding Wyoming Valley are framed by the Pocono Mountains to the east, the Endless Mountains to the north and west, and the Lehigh Valley to the south. The “mighty” Susquehanna River flows through the entire state, through the center of the valley and it defines the northwestern border of the city. The River flows from upstate New York state to the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. The North Branch begins as the outlet of Otsego Lake in Cooperstown, New York. At approximately 444 mi long, it is the longest river on the American east coast and the 16th longest in the United States.

Wilkes-Barre was founded in 1769 and formally incorporated in 1806. The city grew rapidly in the 19th century after the discovery of nearby “black gold” coal reserves and the arrival of hundreds of

thousands of immigrants who provided a labor force for the local mines.



The City reached the height of its prosperity in the first half of the 20th century. Its population peaked at more than 86,000. Following World War II, the city's economy declined due to the collapse of industry. The Knox Mine disaster, a major event in the history of the area is discussed below. It accelerated this trend after large portions of the area's coal mines were flooded and could not be reopened.

Today, the city has a population of 40,569, making it the largest city in Luzerne County and the 18th-largest city in Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, the financial and industrial prosperity and the population of the city have been continually declining. The elimination of all three high schools in the City is not expected to help matters at all. .

The Wilkes-Barre School District was the forerunner of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. There have been schools in Wilkes-Barre City for over 100 years. Wilkes-Barre City itself was founded in 1769 and formally incorporated in 1806. As noted, the city grew rapidly in the 19th century (1800's) after the discovery of nearby coal reserves and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants who provided a labor force for the local mines.

The coal mining fueled the industrialization in the city, which reached such as height of its prosperity in the early 20th century that Wilkes-Barre became known for a time as a boom town. Its population peaked at more than 86,000.

However, following World War II, the city's economy declined due to the collapse of industry, including the mining industry. As noted one of the major disasters that precipitated the demise of the mines was known as the Knox Mine disaster. This disaster was a mining accident on January 22, 1959, at the River Slope Mine in Jenkins Township, Pennsylvania. It was due to mine bosses abusing the mining rules.

The disaster occurred when workers were ordered to dig illegally under the Susquehanna River without proper safety precautions. They mined too close to the surface thus creating a hole in the riverbed above the mines which caused the river to flood into the many interconnected mine galleries in the Wyoming Valley. The mines were thus flooded between the right-bank (western shore) town of Exeter, Pennsylvania, and the left-bank (eastern shore) town of Port Griffith in Jenkins Township, near Pittston.

Twelve miners were killed. Plugging the hole in the riverbed took three days, and mitigation efforts created several new islands between the two towns and altered the western-side flow of the Susquehanna River around these.

The coal industry in northeastern Pennsylvania had already been in decline at the time of the accident as oil and natural gas became more popular forms of energy. The Knox Mine disaster is considered to have been the proverbial nail in the coffin that virtually destroyed the coal mining industry in northeastern Pennsylvania.

The mines could no longer be worked when such large portions of the area's coal mines were flooded from Susquehanna River water and could never be reopened. It was a major loss for Wilkes-Barre surrounding areas. For years Wilkes-Barre had prospered from the coal brought to the surface from these deep mines. Today, Wilkes-Barre has a population of just about 40,000, making it the largest city in Luzerne County and the 13th-largest city in Pennsylvania.

Wilkes-Barre for years has been the major city in the Wilkes-Barre School District. Two thirds of the School District residents live in Wilkes-Barre City proper. In all, the District serves Bear Creek Township, Borough of Bear Creek Village, Borough of Laflin, Buck

Township, City of Wilkes-Barre, Laurel Run Borough, Plains Township and Wilkes-Barre Township. According to recent census data, the district serves a total resident population of over 60,000.



Considering that the Wilkes-Barre Area School District plans to move its high schools out of Wilkes-Barre City, you can imagine how residents of the largest residential area feel about having no high school presence in their city. At one time, there was a school board that cared what its constituent voters thought. Wilkes-Barre will be left with three beautiful unused high school buildings because the school board chose not to maintain them. Wilkes-Barre students will begin to be bussed to Plains Township to attend high school when the Big Toxic School on *Little Chernobyl* is completed.

Let's begin talking about the high school situation by taking a trip down Memory Lane before there even was a high school in the area.

### **Remember When High School Was New in Wilkes-Barre in 1867**

On August 12, 2018, Tom Mooney tackled the history of schools in the Wilkes-Barre area in an opinion article he wrote for the Times Leader, a local newspaper. Tom began by discussing some of the new news on the school situation in 2018, noting that within a few years, the three Wilkes-Barre public high schools will only be memories.

He cited that in the prior week, the School Board (WBASB) had announced that the consolidation plan had been expanded to include all of them – Coughlin, GAR and Meyers – in the new combined high school planned for a site outside the Wilkes-Barre City limits in Plains Township. Wilkes-Barre Area residents know that the building of this complex, which many refer to as The Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl is already under construction.



Original Wilkes-Barre High School later Coughlin

When the consolidation project on Little Chernobyl is completed, an era stretching back a century will have ended. There will be no high schools in Wilkes-Barre City. Mooney's article is a walk down memory lane that takes a short look at the long story of how the three high schools began. Wilkes-Barre itself was founded as previously noted in 1769.

By the time the first high school was ready to be built as the City was beginning to grow, 98 years had passed from its founding. The population had grown to about 4,000. Students from the upper grades in Wilkes-Barre found something new when September of 1867 rolled around – their first-ever high school. They would no longer have to share a building with younger children.

The 1867 new high school building predated Wilkes-Barre High and Coughlin. It was small to say the least by today's standards. It was built on the first block of North Washington Street at Butler Alley. Mooney found some old maps showing that it occupied the space today utilized for a parking lot and the Coughlin High School gym. The teachers, according to records, were women from Philadelphia. Education in the Wyoming Valley was in its infancy. The Miners had



good jobs and the City workers eventually had some money and they loved spending it on the education of their children.

Today there are more students in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District (WBASD) than the population of Wilkes-Barre when its first high school was built. Of course there were not very many students in this first version of a Wilkes-Barre high school, but the city's population – driven by the anthracite industry – was just beginning to grow. From just a little over 4,000 in 1860, according to the U.S. Census, it would surpass 10,000 in 1870. The mines were the big catalyst for growth.

So fast was the growth, in fact, that the district's leaders decided to build a larger high school as soon as possible. In 1881, with the city's population having quickly soared past 23,000, the district opened a new school on East Union Street at North State Street. This building would remain as the Wilkes-Barre High School for three more decades and then, it too would need to be enlarged.

Once again, though, population growth drove local education. By 1900, Wilkes-Barre had 52,000 residents. Plans were laid to build a third and still larger high school. Business was booming with unprecedented growth. The community was ready to afford a great education for its children.

The site chosen for the third new high school was the first block of North Washington Street, between Butler Alley and East Union. Construction soon began, and by 1909 the massive building that still stands there was opened. It was the largest school building in the area. When the District decommissioned this building several years ago, the historical society had the building registered as the oldest high school in the state of Pennsylvania.

There were other parts of the city – namely the Heights and West End (today's South Wilkes-Barre) – which were beginning to grow rapidly. The growth was not about to end any time soon and so the officials decided to build a new high school in each of those sections, one right after the other. Amazing!

What most Wilkes-Barre residents think of as the old Coughlin High School—was established in 1890 after this small school had been operational as Wilkes-Barre High School. The current school structure had been scheduled to be built on the original school's site in 1905, but due to a flood—which flooded the entire basement and first floor, the building had to be restarted.

Eventually it was completed and the building was opened unofficially on September 11, 1911. It was formally dedicated in October 1912. A second part of the building, called the Annex, was built in 1955 and formally dedicated on November 2, 1955. The main building which was once Wilkes-Barre High School has four floors, a basement, and an attic, and the Annex has three stories with a partial basement.

When decommissioned because the board had lost interest in its community and its real estate, it was the oldest active public school in Pennsylvania having been built in 1909. Yes, the older of the two buildings that makes up Coughlin is over 110 years old. The second building is about 60 years old. The school board, looking to build a Taj Mahal could not be concerned about historical consequences.

With the construction of a second-high school in Wilkes-Barre in 1925, the original building name was changed from Wilkes-Barre High and dedicated as James M. Coughlin High School in memory of Superintendent James Martin Coughlin, who served in that capacity from 1890 to 1918.

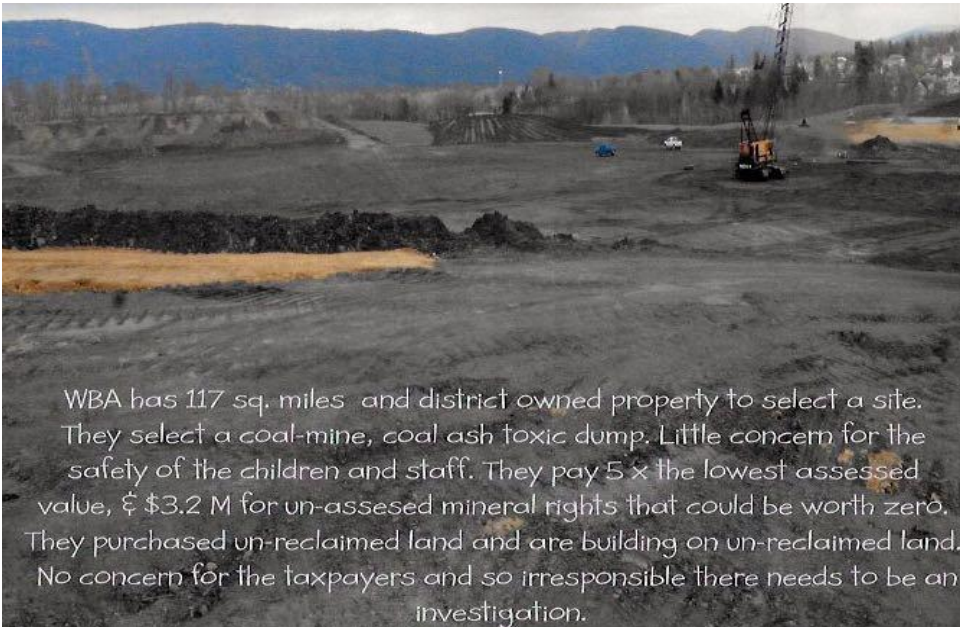
The main building was closed on December 23, 2015, after 104 years of continuous use. This came as a result of a lengthy series of meetings by the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board, where it was decided that Coughlin and another Wilkes-Barre Area High School (Elmer L. Meyers Junior/Senior High School) would close and combine after the Coughlin site was to be closed, and rebuilt. This was one of many plans that were never executed by the *incompetent* WBASB.

In 2015, the omniscient board decided that the Annex building would continue to house 11th and 12th graders until the new school was built on Chernobyl Mountain and then the 9th and 10th grade students would be placed in a recently renovated former Mackin Elementary School building,. As part of a larger scheme, the board

hoped that the 11th and 12th graders from the Annex would be placed in the old Times Leader building next to Coughlin. The board spend \$6 million on that folly because it had not gotten zoning approval before spending on its bogus plan.

Unfortunately for taxpayers in WBA, the WBASB has a long history of making decisions and allocating taxpayer funds when it has no authority to do so. The board had not secured zoning approval for the new site in Wilkes-Barre and so after blowing \$6 million on preparatory activities, zoning was denied and the board from then on hated Wilkes-Barre, its largest constituency. Go figure!

Construction of the proposed but unapproved by zoning Washington Street Consolidated School Complex was expected to be completed by early 2018, when both former high schools would converge in the new school. However, the Board was unable to move forward with the plan to use the Coughlin site. Then what? Well, folks, after this misstep, the board was aggravated at Wilkes-Barre City for not granting zoning wavers that the Board should not have expected. The brash and cocky Superintendent Brian Costello vowed not to build in Wilkes-Barre in a spite move. Refurbishing the three forever schools was deemed by Costello then to be out of the question.



WBA has 117 sq. miles and district owned property to select a site. They select a coal-mine, coal ash toxic dump. Little concern for the safety of the children and staff. They pay 5 x the lowest assessed value, & \$3.2 M for un-assesed mineral rights that could be worth zero. They purchased un-reclaimed land and are building on un-reclaimed land. No concern for the taxpayers and so irresponsible there needs to be an investigation.



So, in another rebound play, on March 5, 2018, the Board was wooed by the Plains Commissioners who promised them gold in their stockings for Christmas. So the dutiful board thinking of the reward of all that gold, voted to purchase land in Plains, Pennsylvania for a new merged massive consolidated high school. What other reason could there have been. If you come up with a better reason, please inform the people of Wilkes-Barre and the people of Plains Twp. Who both took a stiffing on the Board's intransigence.

The plans faced vocal opposition because, of all the wasted money and many other reasons including its being built on a toxic nine dump (Little Chernobyl). This Big Toxic School has still not been accepted by residents who want to go back to the three city High School days. Who would want to breathe toxic ash every school day?

# Chapter 6 Historical Overview of the 3 City High Schools



**Save Wilkes-Barre City High Schools!**

## Three High Schools to be sold for peanuts

If there is a business degree that could be split between all the business tycoons (buffons if you will) who handle finances for the WBASD, it is not speaking up. This board in financial matters is incompetent. For example as Doc Holodick has written about so many times, starting with Coughlin in which to make the school whole, the board invested over \$3 million for asbestos issues and other factors. Now that nobody wants to buy it regardless, all of a sudden the board is ready to lose \$1 million on the deal declaring a fire sale on Coughlin for \$2 million. Who elected these tyrannical scoundrels?

## Some more good stuff about Coughlin

There are bits and pieces of Wilkes-Barre education history that can be found in various places. For example, the history of Coughlin High School, the successor school to Wilkes-Barre High School is documented in the School's 1990 school yearbook.

"That was our anniversary year and for that reason, I thought we should have the history in our yearbook," retired social studies teacher Donald Devans said.

Devans, 80, of Dallas, graduated from Coughlin in 1954. He worked at Coughlin from 1960 to 1997 and he took it as a personal task to write about the school's history in the 1990 yearbook.

"I decided I should put it together, and I took different sources of stuff that was written in the school and tried to combine it together," Devans said. "We took pictures that we found and had them reproduced and put into the story."

It was the school's 100th anniversary that year. When the school was incorporated in 1890, it was known as Wilkes-Barre High School and occupied a building on the corner of Washington and Union streets. Only the third floor was used for high school. The remainder of the building was used as the Union Street Grammar School.



COURTESY OF OLIN EVANS Wilkes-Barre High School occupied the third floor of the building at Union and Washington streets, shown here in 1890.

In 1896, the Union Grade School was built on the same property and the first structure would later be known as the "Old Building." Construction on a new high school across North Washington Street began in 1909.



It opened in 1911. The cost of the four-floor building was \$470,816.97.

The school was renamed James M. Coughlin High School in 1925 after Wilkes-Barre opened a second high school-- GAR. James M. Coughlin served as superintendent of city schools from 1890 to 1918. Coughlin High School kept red and blue as school colors and the school symbol of "Crusader."

The rear of the new high school building contained the auditorium. The exterior walls were constructed of Indiana limestone on a base of red stone from Laurel Run quarries near Wilkes-Barre. The miners of the day spared no expense to build the right schools for their offspring.

"Coughlin is an imposing symmetrical neo-classicist limestone building with projecting end bays and an ornamented language of cornice projections, balustraded parapets and keystone flat arches sitting atop a rusticated ground floor level," a 2014 feasibility report on school district building options says. "The building is a substantial piece of construction by any measure, replete with architectural value." I suspect the board did not get to read that last quote.

The basement included a gymnasium and 10 rooms. On the first floor were offices for the superintendent of schools, the school board, their secretary, the supervisor of drawing, and the high school matron. The principal's office was on the second floor.

At the rear of the Union Street building, a power plant was installed to provide light, heat and ventilation in the new high school, the old high school and the Union Street Grammar building. An underground subway with steam pipes and electric wires connected the power plant and high school buildings.

"People don't realize this building was heated by steam heat," current Coughlin Principal Pat Patte said. "If you notice in front of the street, Washington Street, it doesn't get snow. It melts because the old steam heat runs underneath it. There isn't much snow because the street's so warm."

Devans, a Coughlin student from 1948 to 1954 noted that Coughlin still used the old buildings across the street in the 1950s.

For example, there was a third building across the street that was put to good use until 1972, the year of the Agnes Flood in Wilkes-Barre and surrounds. Its use was for administrative offices and classrooms,

The administration building was on land that currently is used as Coughlin's parking lot.

When the yearbook article author Devans commented on the older buildings he said "I used the buildings across the street. They have long since gone."

In 1955, Coughlin added the annex to the main school along North Washington Street. The annex, shown below, included a new gymnasium, dental unit, washroom, cafeteria, homemaking unit, band room, locker rooms, shower rooms and 12 new classrooms.





Coughlin High School Expansion Called the Annex

The school board voted to borrow \$1.7 million to fund renovations at Coughlin and build the annex.

Jacob P. Breidinger served as school principal from 1901 to 1931 and was the school's longest-serving principal.

The school yearbook was first published in 1924 and became "the Bredlin" in 1925. The name was formed from the first syllable of Breidinger's last name and the last syllable of Coughlin's last name.

A regional school called GAR Memorial High School opened in 1925 in the Heights neighborhood in the city and also served students from the Mayflower and Rolling Mill Hill neighborhoods in the city.

In 1930, the city began building a third high school, Elmer L. Myers High School, in South Wilkes-Barre.

Myers and GAR began as neighborhood-based schools that allowed students to walk to school, and they still operate as neighborhood schools today though their future is very much in doubt with the ongoing construction of the Big Toxic School. Coughlin has always been a more regional school but it too is short lived.

In 1911, Coughlin was centrally located for its student population coming from both the north and south ends of the city. Before the formation of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District in 1972, students from Laurel Run, Bear Creek Township and Bucks Township went to Coughlin on a tuition basis from their respective school districts.

In 1927, Parsons and Miners Mills boroughs were annexed into the city and the former borough high schools became grade schools. The high school students enrolled at Coughlin.

Students attending Coughlin in 1972 came from seven different municipalities — Bear Creek Township, Buck Township, Laflin, Laurel Run, Plains Township, Wilkes-Barre Township, and parts of Wilkes-Barre.

In 1972, the high schools of Wilkes-Barre Township and Plains Township became junior high schools.

"The present Coughlin High School has some unusual characteristics," as Devans wrote in the 1990 yearbook. "It is an urban school but not a neighborhood school. Out of the 1,097 students that attend Coughlin, 807 ride buses to school."

### **Flood damage**

Coughlin sustained major damage from the two floods of the Susquehanna River. The St. Patrick's Day Flood of 1936 caused Coughlin to be closed from March 18 to March 25. Floodwaters warped the gym floor, destroyed stored books and knocked out cafeteria motors. The Hurricane Agnes flood in June 1972 caused extensive damage to the basement and first floor of both buildings. The loss of supplies and equipment was estimated at \$700,000. Because of the severity of the damage, officials delayed the opening of school to mid-September.

In May 2014, the school district installed protective scaffolding along the exterior of Coughlin by its main and secondary entrances due to exterior deterioration. Later that month, officials discovered exterior deterioration at Meyers High School and decided to spend more than \$400,000 on a feasibility study of district building options.

The school board approved plans to spend \$8 million renovating the closed Mackin Elementary School as a backup location for Coughlin students in the event Coughlin were to close.

In June 2015, the school board approved a plan to merge Coughlin and Meyers high schools in a new building on the current Coughlin site. In January, the district closed Coughlin's main building and moved roughly 500 students in 11th and 12th grades into the annex.

The ninth and 10th grades moved into the renovated Mackin school in the city's East End.

The district has hired crews to clean out the main building and prepare for the building's demolition.

"I am very saddened," Devans said. "The memories of the students and the past and individuals who graduated, it's sad to see the old things go. The younger generation they don't see it that way, maybe. I don't think you build schools like the old ones. There is so much in that building." Facts for this piece were provided by [mbuffer@citizensvoice.com](mailto:mbuffer@citizensvoice.com);

## **Tell me just a little more about Coughlin High School's History**

This year, the Coughlin High School History Club is in its sixth year as a club. It was started by seniors from the class of 2015 who were interested in history. The club sold t-shirts as its first fundraiser. As the club evolves, we are hoping to participate in community service events and even plan field trips to different historic destinations.

### **Trivia About Coughlin**

Below are some interesting bits of trivia the CHS History Club compiled.

- 1890, oldest high school in Wilkes-Barre, Union Street High School \$56,000
- 1896, Union Street Grade School built on same location, high school entered on N Washington St, Grade school entered through E. Union St.
- Two schools were connected with a bridge
- Wilkes-Barre High School began construction in 1909 (where CHS is now), first occupied in 1911, \$470,816.97
- First clubs were literary societies, Cliosophic and Sorosis formed in 1895
- 1925, building dedicated in the name of the first Superintendent James M. Coughlin
- 1955, construction was completed on the "annex", \$1,743,000.00
- School was flooded in 1972
- The Journal is the longest continuously published high school newspaper in the U.S., it approximately started in 1892
- Today made up of 7 municipalities
- First graduating class had 10 dyudents
- 15 total principals in history, first was TJ McConnon, JP Briedinger was longest running principal, school yearbook was first published in 1924 named Briedlin, combination of Briedlinger and Coughlin
- Alma Mater was written by Bessie Stella Jones class of 1907

**After Coughlin High School became operational, came GAR**

## **GAR Memorial High School**

By 1925 the Heights had a school, named GAR Memorial (a bow to the Civil War veterans' group Grand Army of the Republic). Almost immediately, work began on the third WB school and by 1930 it was open, honoring school board member Dr. Elmer L. Meyers. The old Wilkes-Barre High School was renamed for former superintendent James M. Coughlin.

## Local high school only one in the nation named after Grand Army of the Republic

May 18, 2015 Thanks to the Times Leader

Wilkes-Barre was booming. In 1921, plans for a new junior-senior high school were moving along. The big question was, what to name it?



GAR Memorial High School

Three members of the school board were sons of Civil War soldiers. One of them –John A. Hourigan — proposed “Grand Army of the Republic.” It was a nickname for U.S. military forces during the 1861-1865 conflict and the name taken by a veteran’s group. It’s a unique name. So unique, that a comprehensive online list of American public high schools shows no other school shares the name.

“Every member of the board approved, and the structure came to be known as the GAR Memorial High School” the district announced in the building’s dedicatory booklet of 1925.

Ninety years later, in the sesquicentennial year of the end of the Civil War, the school still stands and its name still conjures memories of the blue-uniformed troops who saved the American union.

## Some more facts about Wilkes-Barre and its high schools

### **GROWTH IN NUMBERS**

Early in the 20th century, the city of Wilkes-Barre was prosperous and growing steadily. Figures in the “Wilkes-Barre Record Almanac” show that between 1900 and 1910, the population increased from 51,000 to 67,000. The surge was driven by the anthracite coal industry, and by 1920, the population had reached 73,000. Annexing nearby towns (Parsons & Miners Mills) pushed the figure to about 87,000 by the end of the 1920s.

The public school system was overburdened. Along with population growth, more students stayed in school the full 12 years. By the end of the second decade of the century, more than 12,000 students were enrolled in the system, nearly 2,000 of them crowded into the Wilkes-Barre High School (now known as Coughlin).

So, the forward-thinking school district of the post-World War I era found a solution: build two new junior high schools for the fastest growing parts of the city. The first in the Heights, the second in South Wilkes-Barre.



### **HONORING THE SOLDIERS**

The regions Civil War veterans, their ranks diminishing rapidly, had long advocated some sort of recognition for their beloved Grand Army of the Republic. The largest GAR group in the area was the Conyngham Post 97.

<<< Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Building on South Main Street Wilkes-Barre PA

The G.A.R. organization was housed in a magnificent, castle-like building on South Main Street. As an organization, its initial priority was campaigning for a memorial clock tower on Public Square.

Some disliked that idea, preferring to keep the square open. Others pushed the idea of honoring the old vets by dedicating the newly planned Market Street Bridge.

It was against that background that Hourigan, also a journalist who owned the daily Wilkes-Barre Evening News, proposed the Civil War-related name for the new Heights school.

By autumn 1922, the structural framework of the building was in place. On Oct. 14, four uniformed Civil War veterans laid the cornerstone. GAR Commander A.H. Brown drew the eras together when he proclaimed the school “a monument to the heroism of the past and a storehouse of knowledge for the future.”

The school’s location carried the Civil War theme further. Old maps show, by the late 19th century, the city gave names of prominent Civil War personalities to cross streets in the Heights section. The new school was between streets honoring generals Grant and Sherman, part of a grid bearing names of Lincoln, Welles (secretary of the Navy) and generals Hancock, Meade, Sheridan and Custer.

## The Naming and Dedication



In the autumn of 1925, GAR Memorial High School was operational. On Nov. 21, it was dedicated in an elaborate ceremony presided over by Dr. Elmer L. Meyers, the school board president who led the project to completion. Hourigan became the vice president.

The original student body of 1,500 had found a palatial structure, with marble flooring and sweeping staircases, the railings and light fixtures made of bronze. A towering plaque, designed by 14-year-old Sarah Hughes, portrayed a robed figure, representing education,



giving a laurel wreath to a Civil War soldier and simultaneously handing a torch of learning to a young woman.

[Please note that all three of the high school buildings in Wilkes-Barre were grand edifices made with the finest building materials and built to last forever, with normal maintenance procedures. After a refurbishing and an extension with a new cafeteria, a new gym, a chorus room and some repurposing in 1978, and a weight room addition in 2005, and new turf in front of the building in 2013, GAR is still in fine shape.]

Ringed the auditorium were windows designed as memorials to the titans of western culture. The choice of distinctive Civil War Union blue and Confederate gray as the school's colors was inevitable. The front featured a huge stone porch topped by a high arch, suggesting the building was fit to serve as a towering national monument.

The dedicatory booklet reminded visitors it was “a great school structure, named for the boys who stood firm in the days that tried men's souls.”

With the construction of Meyers High School in South Wilkes-Barre a few years later, the city's school district took on the form familiar to succeeding generations.

Hourigan saw his Evening News newspaper merge with The Times Leader in 1939 and eventually, he became chairman of board of the Wilkes-Barre Publishing Co. He died in 1951.

Elmer L. Meyers was honored by the naming of Wilkes-Barre's third high school for him in 1930. A staff physician at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, he died in 1936.

The last of the four Civil War veterans who laid the cornerstone, Charles Rhenard, died in 1939. The South Main Street GAR Hall, became a theater and office building. It was torn down in the '60s as part of an urban redevelopment program. The space is now a parkade.

Troubled by its now-aging junior and senior high schools, the district has studied various modernization possibilities, including building a new centralized senior high school.

The future of Wilkes-Barre Area's three big and historic buildings – Coughlin, GAR and Meyers — is still uncertain in everybody's mind but the determined school board who want nothing short of the destruction of all three grand high school buildings in Wilkes-Barre with a huge complex out of the city in Plains Township that is irreverently referred to as The Big Toxic High on the *Little Chernobyl* site. .

For years, the district supported three high schools whose names are very familiar today but with The Big Toxic School construction well underway. It is clear that unless the Save Our Schools group with Dr. Richard Holodick serving as President succeeds in its preservation efforts, Wilkes-Barre PA will be without a high school within the City's borders. Additionally, the bus lines will be getting a major shot in the arm to tote students up the big hill from Wilkes-Barre to Little Chernobyl; on top of a major coal culm hill in Plains Twp.

The school building boom was fortunate, because in the 1920s the city of Wilkes-Barre expanded itself by absorbing the adjacent boroughs of Parsons and Miners Mills. This brought the city's population to more than 86,000 by 1930.

Even though some young people were still leaving school early to work, the total number of students grew by leaps and bounds up through the 1930s. My father, born in 1915, graduated from Coughlin High School shortly after it superseded Wilkes-Barre High School.



**Meyers High School Campus**

**Meyers High praised in a student essay**

## **History of Elmer L. Meyers High School Remembered,**

**By Lydia McFarlane, Newspaper In Education student columnist, Jun 4, 2019 Updated Jun 18, 2020**

As the doors begin to close on the reign of grand old Elmer L. Meyers High School, it is time we take a look back and remember the history of the place that has impacted so many for decades. It is hard to believe that a school opened in 1930 is still standing and very much still "Steadfast Forever" as noted in the Meyers Alma Mater, so many decades later.

It is no secret that the spirit of Meyers is something that is carried with you all throughout life. [Both Richard Holodick and Brian Kelly are Meyers graduates who still have their school spirit.] Many other alumni feel the touch of Meyers in their hearts far into their adult lives. Blue and gold will forever live on in the veins of everyone who has come into contact with the school, but the spirit is not all that needs preserving.

The history of Meyers is something not often talked about, and as new doors start to open for the Wilkes-Barre Area School District, it is our duty as a community to never let the history of Meyers die along with the school. The school was opened in 1930, a true Depression-era school. It took four years of planning and work to build the now local monument.



LYDIAMCFARLANE Meyers News

The building spreads over three acres. The prominent main stairway is made of marble, specifically, "Giallo D'Istria, from Italy."

Meyers was seen as a feat of modern architecture and technology, and it was something the people of the city were very proud to see built. According to the school dedication program, the school was said to be, "a Depression-era construction project. The school embodies the grand design of early 20th-century public architecture."

It was "dedicated to community progress," says an original dedication to Meyers High, which it indeed succeeded in doing. It helped the city to move forward and really become much more of a community. According to this same dedication, "It is the gift of the people ... to the youth of Wilkes-Barre that opportunity may increase, education advance, and patriotic citizenship be founded."

On Monday, Sept. 15, 1930, the new school was opened to all. The leaders of the school board and the entire community wanted to take steps forward for equality and modernism, as they did not discriminate against anyone in times of prejudice and hatred. "... it is dedicated as an institution of learning, knowing no sect, no creed, no color, erected by the children of yesterday for their children of today ..."



SUBMITTED PHOTO NIE columnist Lydia McFarlane holds a portrait of Dr. Elmer L. Meyers, the school's namesake, on the entry staircase of the school.

Dr. Elmer L. Meyers was described as, "The original prospector, who staked out the first claim and left the following proof." He was chosen to be honored following the trend established within the

Wilkes-Barre Area School District where they gave names to school buildings in recognition of community service.

Dr. Meyers was a teacher, a distinguished physician, a 20-year member of the school board, and head of the Teachers' Committee for 15 years. His "record and his exemplary citizenship make Dr. Meyers outstanding in service and worthy of the honor conferred upon him."



Here is a Colophon picture from 1965 of the same staircase. One of your authors is in this picture.

Now, decades later, Elmer L. Meyers is a household name for people in our community. The respect and honor that people feel for a man from so long ago is immense. His legacy will forever live on in the hearts of all Mohawks and as the name of the school we all have come to know and love.

As we make our way to change and newness, we are at risk of forgetting what it is that got us to where we are today. It is important to always remember the history of a building that has given so much to our community over decades. It would not be fair to the amazing place that Meyers is today to just forget about its great history and how it came to be.

The name Elmer L. Meyers is one we should say with reverence, as without him, our great school would not be the same. It is time for the rich history of our beautiful school to run side by side with the blue and gold that will forever course through our veins.

### **More on Meyers**

By the early 21st century, the school was seen to be in disrepair from apparent neglect, with safety structures in the form of scaffolding and wooden barriers erected in front of building facades. Moreover, major repairs were needed for the attached Memorial Stadium.

The Board was out to get Meyers right from the start making up stories that Meyers was not being physically sound. Yet, when the Board's major construction project was not permitted by Wilkes-Barre City Zoning, somehow, the Board then said that Meyers was sound enough to stay on as a major high school. The people did not understand the on again off-again nature of a major city high school

Meyers got its breath of life when on June 10, 2016, the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board voted to consolidate the local schools, merging Meyers and Coughlin into a new 9th through 12th grade school to be built on the Coughlin site in downtown Wilkes-Barre. The 7th and 8th grades were to be merged with Kistler Elementary to make that into a K-8th school.

The Board was ready to do anything to have its way. However, they were unable to move forward with the plan to use the Coughlin site or another site in Wilkes-Barre around the Times Leader Building.

So, in February 2018, the Board hemmed and hawed about the possibility of using Meyers as a middle school. Then, on March 5, 2018, the Board voted to purchase land in Plains, Pennsylvania for the merged high school. There is a lot of information in this book about the Plains transaction and most of it does not pass the smell test.

The sniffers who checked out the Board's actions found a lot wrong with their thinking. Could there have been some favoritism and unlawful actions so the board could have its way without following its own by-laws.

The plans have faced vocal opposition from many of the people for when it added GAR High School to the mix, it would leave Wilkes-Barre City, the largest municipality in Luzerne County with no high schools at all. How could that help the city with the largest tax base in the county? The people did not like it one bit. The board must have thought its term was limitless. Several board members, who were part of this poor consolidation choice, are already gone and the rest will follow as the people get their inflated tax bills.

There were counter proposals with some suggesting that the school be turned into a charter school. [The school has been listed as an "At Risk" for historic preservation location by Preservation Pennsylvania, who noted that "as a Depression-era construction project, the school embodies the grand design of early 20th-century public architecture. It serves a diverse neighborhood, and is located in a central location that children can walk to."] Normal human beings cannot figure out why the board took the actions it did directly against the people's wishes.

Coughlin, GAR, and Meyers are still beautiful schools worth savings. The WBASB neglected them until there were maintenance issues. They are still sturdy enough to be refurbished and used forever when the Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl; fails to receive its occupancy permit.



Until the Board cuts over to the construction project of the Big Toxic School, and possibly gains its undeserved occupancy, Meyers & GAR and the Coughlin replacement will continue to provide education to approximately 898 students in grades 7–12. Its teacher ratio is good at approximately 12.6 students per teacher. Besides the marble staircases and the granite hallways, the auditorium is adorned with copious stained glass. None of this richness of the 1930's is included in the construction of the Big Toxic Consolidated School, which looks like it has been designed by Lionel's second-tem of Plasticville Engineers.

For a zillion years, the student body of Meyers has collectively been referred to as the "Mohawks". Meyers has many traditions that are still practiced today including a Moving Up Day, a ceremony that officially marks the junior class move to senior status, as well as the senior class moving to the stage for graduation, which happens the day after in the school's auditorium. The school also celebrates senior tea, a tradition that was started in the 1930s.

Coughlin, GAR and Meyers are neighborhood schools which is the preferred type of school in modern times. They require minimal to no bussing and the facilities are close enough that students can engage in activities without requiring bus rides to / from home events.

Smaller neighborhood schools such as Meyers, according to experts and reinforced by Dr. Richard Holodick, a national expert with impeccable credentials, tend to do a better job of making students feel connected. Studies have documented better relationships are likely to occur in smaller settings. "Students feel supported and cared for," they assert.

Copious research has shown reduced rates of student participation in extra-curricular activities in larger schools, Holodick noted. And there are concerns about kids getting lost in the largeness. That my friends is a big reason why the Save our Schools group has been lobbying for years for the neighborhood v consolidated approach. But it is not the only reason. There are many.

Children / Students thrive in an environment where faculty, staff and fellow students know their names and who they are. This opportunity

does not exist in a centralized school. In a neighborhood school, students have less chance of falling through the cracks because of this familiarity, and there is less risk of being overlooked. Smaller schools feel like a second “family” to students – not an industrial warehouse or in this case, a Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl of which, occupants must be concerned for their health.

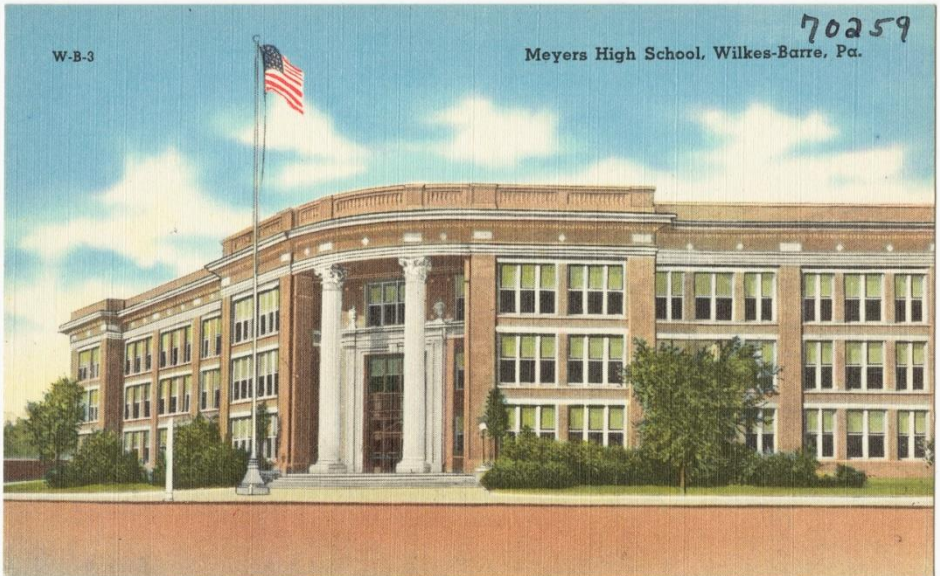
# Chapter 7 Meyers Historical Resource Survey

## For PA Bureau for Historic Preservation.

Prepared by:  
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Permission granted for use. Email evidence supplied for Amazon reviewers:  
Brian:

Thank you for your email. I would be happy to assist - I've attached the Historic Resource Survey Form narratives for Meyers HS to this email for your use. There is no need to credit me as the author: I had prepared this at the request of the Borlands, Dr. Holodick, and Dr. Schiowitz with the expectation that they would insert it into the Historic Resource Survey Form that they were planning to submit to the PA Bureau for Historic Preservation. I hope that this is useful; please let me know if you have any questions.  
Thanks,  
Larry



Editor: This chapter formalizes the notion of E.L. Meyers High school and its fine design and tasteful workmanship. This building is what is called today a “forever school” in contrast to the Lionel Train-type Plastic Ville model schools that are built as replacements See below school house. Instead of schools that are designed to last forever, today’s schools such as the big consolidated toxic school being built outside of Wilkes-Barre to replace Meyers, Coughlin, & GAR, is to last about forty years when it will have to be replaced.



Original Plasticville (Lionel) School House

The Original Plasticville School House is more than likely made of similar material as the Big Toxic School at Chernobyl, except the Red School House will probably last longer than the new consolidated school. *Just saying!*

## Continuation Physical Description and Integrity (Item 38)

Meyers High School, constructed as a junior-senior high school for the Wilkes-Barre City School District in the late 1920's, continues to serve its original function. Built in the Firwood section of South Wilkes-Barre, on the site of the old Catlin Farm, it was designed to accommodate 2,200 students.

The building's distorted pentagonal plan is cleverly shaped to take advantage of an irregular urban site that is dominated by the important intersection of Carey Avenue and Hanover Street, two major South Wilkes-Barre thoroughfares. The school's rounded entrance portico at that intersection is designed to command the view along Hanover Street as one proceeds west past Geisinger South Wilkes-Barre (originally Mercy) Hospital, and along Carey Avenue as one proceeds northeast from Firwood Park. The building occupies 3 acres, with the remaining 4 acres containing the adjoining Wilkes-Barre Memorial Stadium.

In plan, the building's parti is comprised of three major elements arranged around the perimeter of the site: a three-story double-loaded classroom block whose splayed wings, set parallel to Carey Avenue and Hanover Street, are hinged around the building's primary entrance and monumental central stairwell; a three-story block, attached to the Carey Avenue classroom wing and containing the building's auditorium and gymnasium; and a single-loaded rear classroom block, set at 90 degrees to the Hanover Street wing and fronting the stadium to the building's west.

A subsidiary interior wing, containing classrooms and the building's natatorium, tees off the west side of the auditorium block, dividing the building's pentagonal interior court into three smaller light wells. The building's power plant occupies a separate building to the east of the auditorium wing.

The building's primary façade, clad in buff brick above an Indiana limestone water table, is dominated by two monumental porticoes: one, marking the building's main entrance, at the intersection of Carey and Hanover; and the other, at the eastern end of the building's Carey Avenue elevation, denoting the entrance to the high

school's auditorium and gymnasium. Both monumental porticoes feature three-story stone Corinthian columns set below a giant entablature, which also caps the classroom wings. The remainder of the building's street facade is fenestrated with rows of ganged windows separated into bays by plain brick pilasters. The building's original brick parapet, together with an elaborate balustrade above the two porticoes, was removed in recent years because of concerns about structural deterioration.

The building's west façade, while not as heroic in design as the Carey Avenue and Hanover Street facades, creates an imposing backdrop to Wilkes-Barre Memorial Stadium. The stadium itself sits well below street level, permitting direct access from the locker rooms in the basement of the western wing to the adjacent playing field. A concrete deck, extending the length of the western elevation, once provided direct access to the stadium home-side bleachers (also recently demolished).



### **Continuation Sheet: Physical Description and Integrity (Item 38)**

The school building incorporates several significant interior spaces. The first of these is the primary stair hall, a grandly scaled space immediately adjoining the school's main entrance, and featuring a

monumental double-return main staircase rising the full height of the building. The stairhall walls and the stair's treads and balustrades are clad in Giallo D'Istrio marble; decorative art glass windows provide illumination.



SUBMITTED PHOTO NIE columnist Lydia McFarlane holds a portrait of Dr. Elmer L. Meyers, the school's namesake, on the entry staircase of the school.



Stained Glass Ceiling in the Auditorium (art glass laylight )

The auditorium is another significant interior space. Accommodating 1,650, it features a proscenium stage and a rectangular main floor beneath a raked C-shaped balcony. The auditorium ceiling is dominated by an enormous art glass laylight with a border comprised of the state seals of each of the 48 states of the union at the time of the school's construction.

The auditorium's arcaded sidewalls, clad in walnut, feature eight additional art glass panels depicting a series of significant events in American history: "The Landing of Columbus;" "Signing of the Treaty with the Indians and William Penn," Washington at Valley Forge," Signing of the Declaration of Independence;" "Lincoln's Gettysburg Address," "Roosevelt at San Juan Hill," "Landing of the Pilgrims," and "The Return of the Soldiers with General Pershing from the World War," All of the building's art glass is the work of the Payne Studios of Paterson, New Jersey.

The building's other primary interior spaces include a gymnasium, a natatorium, a cafeteria, and industrial arts rooms. These, together with all of the building's classrooms, are linked by a series of stacked



corridors featuring iron-spot brick wainscot and built-in display cases. In the academic blocks, the corridors are double-loaded with classrooms on either side; those facing the building's interior courts are generously fenestrated. While many of these rooms and spaces have undergone cosmetic modifications, they continue to reflect the design ethos of the Progressive Era.

Despite interior modifications such as the painting of portions of the brick wainscot lining the building's corridors, the 1970's replacement of original wood and steel sash windows along the school's street elevations, and the more recent removal of Meyers' original ornamental balustrades and parapet, the building still maintains its design integrity, along with almost all of its major character-defining features.

# # #

**Continuation Sheet:  
History and Significance (Item 38)**

The Elmer L. Meyers Junior/Senior High School (“Meyers High School”) is an intact example of a monumental Beaux-Arts urban high school of the early 20th-century, designed to extend the availability of secondary public education to coal-age Wilkes-Barre’s expanding southern neighborhoods. Built from 1926 to 1930, it was the final major achievement of Wilkes-Barre’s most important school architect, Robert Ireland. It was built at a time when the wards in the southern part of the prospering industrial city were being rapidly developed to meet the needs of a striving and expanding urban middle class.

Meyers High School was designed to serve the city’s South Wilkes-Barre and Rolling Mill Hill neighborhoods. Its construction was part of a larger plan, developed by the Wilkes-Barre City School Board, to construct new secondary buildings in each quadrant of the city in order to meet the educational demands posed by substantial growth in Wilkes-Barre’s neighborhoods during the apex of the city’s population and prosperity.

The building's namesake, Dr. Elmer L. Meyers, was once a teacher at Wilkes-Barre High School. There, he created the school's first football team, literary society, and journal before leaving to attend medical school. Returning to Wilkes-Barre to practice as a physician, he was later elected to serve as school director. In that role, which he held for 25 years (from 1911 to 1936), Meyers championed the city district's school construction campaign - an effort culminating in the construction of Meyers High School.

Since its opening in 1930, Meyers has continued to serve its original function as a neighborhood public high school. Notable graduates have included Nobel Prize winning geneticist Edward Lewis; constitutional law scholar and former UC Berkeley Law School dean Jesse Choper; litigation attorney Jerome Facher; NFL wide receivers and brothers Qadry and Raghil Ismail; and film producer and "M.A.S.H." editor Stanford Tischler.

And, from the start, Meyers' auditorium has served its intended purpose as a community venue. It has hosted speakers ranging from attorney Clarence Darrow to aviator Amelia Earhart, performers such as popular violinist David Rubinoff and the Alexander Band, and countless civic events.

Meyers High School is significant as a physical manifestation of Late Progressive Era educational theory. From the rationalism of its planning, to its deliberate accommodation of industrial arts, domestic science, and physical education, to the way that it was consciously designed to function as the civic center of its urban neighborhood, it embodies the goals and aspirations of the Progressive Era in education as that movement reached its pre-Depression heights.

The building possesses all of the design elements desired in a high school by Progressive-Era educators: a monumental entrance; classrooms and corridors planned to accommodate the "Gary Plan" of instruction; distinct auditorium, gymnasium, science, and domestic and industrial arts wings; and didactic decorative elements (such as the auditorium's art-glass lessons in American history and civics).

**Continuation Sheet:  
History and Significance (Item 38)**

It is also significant as the last major design of Robert Ireland, Wilkes-Barre's most important educational architect during the early twentieth century. Ireland, an English émigré, specialized in the design of coal breakers, factories, and other industrial structures before becoming the Wilkes-Barre School District's Supervisor of Buildings. He applied a rational, strikingly modernist ethos to the design of the city's Weaver, Palmer, and Guthrie primary schools (the latter listed individually on the National Register), and an addition to the Grant Street primary school, before authoring the city's two 1920's high schools – Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) Memorial High School in the Heights section, and E.L. Meyers in South Wilkes-Barre.

Ireland's design for Meyers High School is architecturally significant as a major example of the late Beaux Arts style applied to public education, with a clever plan and monumental elevation accommodating the complex program of a large public high school to an awkward urban site, and highlighting a grand auditorium and other interior spaces reflecting the building's civic purpose.

The building's heroic facade, with its colonnaded porticos, classical styling, and rational emphasis on daylighting and circulation, was specifically conceived in response to its prominent location at the intersection of two major South Wilkes-Barre thoroughfares; it is an excellent illustration of the design trends common to American public school architecture during the early twentieth century.

At the same time, the building's straightforward details and finishes reflect Ireland's focus on efficiency, safety, and rationality – interests that were shared by Wilkes-Barre's school board and the Progressive-Era educational experts who inspired them.

Inside and out, despite significant institutional neglect, the building retains significant integrity as well as all of its major character-defining features.

Elmer L. Meyers High School meets two criteria and areas of significance for the National Register of Historic Places during the period 1929 to 1952 under Criteria A and C. Under Criterion A, the building played a significant role in the history of public education in the City of Wilkes-Barre. Under Criterion C, it is not only a significant example of the monumental Beaux Arts style as applied to a late Progressive-era urban public high school, but it is also the final major work of important Wilkes-Barre architect Robert Ireland.

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## Editors Comment

Larry Newman wrote the above recommendation to the State Bureau of Historic Preservation. Because he and many others in the Wilkes-Barre Area believe that Wilkes-Barre City's Meyers High School, which opened in 1930, belongs on the National Historic Registry.

Wilkes-Barre had been blessed with three well-constructed, elegantly designed high schools made of stone. They are granite and marble schools with major architectural plusses. There is perhaps more written about Elmer L. Meyers High School in this book than the other two high schools. Coughlin for years was the oldest active high school in Pennsylvania but like all buildings "maintained" by the Wilkes-Barre Area School District, it fell into disrepair from neglect and it has been taken off-line. GAR High School was the second school in Wilkes-Barre history built by the District several years before Meyers.

Meyers is the newest of the schools and is the grandest in its unique shape and accoutrements. In its prime, Meyers hosted two swimming pools and two gymnasiums to show the care for the children of six grades 7-12 who attended the school. Graduating classes would often go back on their alumni reunion weekends to get a tour of that unique character and beauty of Meyers High School.

The same School Board that let the oldest school in Pennsylvania fall into disrepair along with other District properties permitted Meyers to go without needed maintenance for years. This book is a tale of neglect by incompetent Directors and School Officials who took schools built to last forever and declared them dead from their own neglect. It is such a sin, it will never be forgotten.

Mark Schiowitz is a concerned Wilkes-Barre citizen who coached for years for the District and volunteered his time as a Physician to assure the safety of players in sports such as football at Meyers. Though the Big Toxic School is being built despite its violation of EPA and DEP rules and Common Sense concerned citizens such as Dr. Mark, a local Surgeon, have joined the Save Our Schools Group, and periodically write an article in the blog or the local paper to remind others of Wilkes-Barre City's deep loss.

When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to speak up. You have to say something; you have to do something.

[John Lewis](#)

Here is a submission by Dr. Mark Schiowitz from early August 2020 with the same sentiments of John Lewis.

There is no respect for the beauty, strength, scope, architecture materials or traditions surrounding our classic schools. Meyers, for instance, has withstood systematic neglect, and the board majority is determined to gut it for unknown reasons. Meyers was named to the 2018 list of at risk Pa. structures. The district never submitted its plan for school closures or demolition to the State Bureau of Historic Preservation. Meyers belongs on the National Historic Registry.

(But) even more importantly, a huge amount of money is being expended on a consolidated school for 4 grades, leaving the city with no high school, creating universal busing and the need for another middle school, an outdated concept.

(And...) still more importantly, there is no support for consolidation in the educational literature of the last 50 years, much support for neighborhood schools, and evidence that consolidation harms academics, participation, security, the dropout rate AND costs more to operate.

That's all frustrating, but the board majority, the solicitor and the superintendent then outdid themselves by utilizing a building site that defies EPA and other siting guidelines, is subsidence prone, and is a coal ash dump, a potential chronic disease and cancer locus. But, they obtained this non-reclaimed strip mine for a mere \$4.2 million, assessed maximally at \$800,000. So, they are also bargain hunters who have used our money to reclaim a site which was the responsibility of the mining company, and will be throwing more away to defray Pendot expenses with X-Valley Expressway access. And Pagnotti, the seller, transferred their mining permit to adjacent land. Wonder what environmental boost that will provide? It's such a perfect cluster that in this county, one must at least consider...Cui Bono?

## Chapter 8 A 50-50 Record on Academic Achievement



Fifty-fifty is the same as half and half. Thus, the academic achievement of the Wilkes-Barre Area has been good at times and bad at times. Half the time good and half the time bad. It was not always like this.

When the schools were founded, the workers in the area were mostly coal miners and though they engaged in menial labor, they were nonetheless intelligent people having descended from people of all nationalities who migrated from Europe in the earlier centuries. The coal mines offered a tough but a good living and the pay was good.

Even today, miners make a good living with the wage coming in between \$30,000 and \$70,000 annually with no higher education required.

In some places, the wages are even better. Wilkes-Barre Area Anthracite coal mining is not as prevalent today but soft coal mining jobs are plentiful. For example, nine out of 10 Appalachian men do not receive college degrees; some don't even finish high school. The average starting salary for these coal miner workers is \$60,000.

There are many miners, even today who can't get enough of the work in the mines. Some miners say that "craving coal dust is like Nicotine: it's part of why miners love the work. "It's in the blood," said Bob Payne, 63, a retired mine worker, who says he's disappointed his son had to quit the business after a few months because he became claustrophobic. Payne said coal mining builds "unity" and "brotherhood" among coworkers that makes working in the dark and in danger rewarding.

There was always a lot of spirit in the mines. Some old timers may remember the deep mining days in Wilkes-Barre / Scranton PA when the first block from the mine entrance was loaded with miner bars. The miners would get a "bracer" in the form of a schnorkie at 5:00 AM or earlier to help face the day and they would get together at the same stop after work for an hour or so to get the dust out of their throats. There was a lot of collegiality.

They were proud of their children and wanted to help them do well in life. And, so, they wanted their schools to be built well and they wanted their children to be taught well and they were. Wilkes-Barre School District changed to Wilkes-Barre Area in 1972. Around this time the District had been at the top of its game for about 50 years. That's 50-years of high achievement.

Now, long after the days of mining in the Area, achievement is not so good. The District took its best achievement years up front and so in the last half, the Wilkes-Barre Area School District has come in at about dead last in outside measurement rank. In fact, they District is almost last in the state with just one recent exception.



Mark Guydish, Reporter for the Times Leader local paper wrote this about the plight of Luzerne County (Wilkes-Barre Area) schools in a short, May 2, 2018 article that fits in this chapter perfectly:

WILKES-BARRE — Administration and school board members in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District have heard recurring complaints of low test scores [they are true] and shoddy academic performances at schools, including frequent quotes from lists that put it on the academic slag heap of the state’s 500 public districts.

But they may have been handed a counterclaim Tuesday: Meyers High School made the “Niche Standout High Schools” list for 2018.

In Pennsylvania, 24 high schools made the standout list. Meyers ranked 15th among those, with an overall grade of B. No other Luzerne County schools were on the list.

The “Standout” rankings start by limiting scrutiny to public high schools with at least 50 percent of students identified as economically disadvantaged. Those schools must also score an overall “Niche Grade” of B or higher — a separate “report card” letter grade devised using factors including test results, survey results, teacher salary and absenteeism, and clubs and activities, to name a few.

In naming “standout high schools,” Niche uses U.S. Department of Education data, which is often several years old. In this case, most of the data is from 2014-16.

Ironically, at the same time E.L. Meyers High School was gaining plaudits for sitting at the top of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District heap with its standout rankings, the Board Superintendent and the Board Members were busy trying to figure out a way to ram the demolition of Meyers down the throats of the neighborhood folks in South Wilkes-Barre.

Here is clipping from the same time that Niche gained its records for Meyers' ranking award.

Published: 4:52 PM EDT October 18, 2016

WILKES-BARRE -- It looks as though the Wilkes-Barre Area School District wants to knock down Meyers Junior/Senior High School while still preserving parts of the building.

The school board voted Monday night in favor of a plan that would eventually demolish most of Meyers while keeping the auditorium and football field.

If you were last in the state in everything, do you think you would punish the only neighborhood that brings national respect to the District? Do you think you might try to figure out what the principals and teachers of Meyers were doing differently than in the other schools. Perhaps the other school teachers and administrators can learn from the success of Meyers.

That would be if you cared about academic achievement and not as much about building new buildings and ripping down the most well-built buildings in the school district. How is it that the people of this area reelected most of the board that permitted the buildings to deteriorate so badly that they pleaded their case to build a new school as the only remedy.

Well, obviously the Save Our Schools group led by Dr. Richard Holodick and if you asked, most of Wilkes-Barre, think it is a fool hearty project that has something other than the welfare of the children at its foundation.

Let me repeat some of what we have been discussing in this chapter: The Wilkes-Barre School District's high schools, Coughlin, GAR, and Meyers, even before the community mergers that occurred in the early 1970's, always had excellent academic records causing many dignitaries to visit. Today unfortunately, WBASD high schools are near the bottom in ranking in the state of PA.

Many believe that the board's desire to play level 6A sports was a major motivator for the consolidation. The big consolidated school

approach adopted as the solution may mean the Board wants to play level 6A Sports but it also means the Board is not trying to fix today's academic problems. Consolidation would be the wrong approach if the board wanted to improve the academic record. This would not stand in Wilkes-Barre School District days.

For example, in days gone by, the Elmer L. Meyers High School has had visits from various very famous individuals. John Philip Sousa performed in its magnificent auditorium on August 31, 1931. Amelia Earhart visited in spring of 1936 after the Meyer's High School Women's Club brought her in to talk to students about "Adventures in Flying".

More recently, but not consistently, the Meyers school had Travis Clark and Hunter Thomsen from We The Kings perform an acoustic set in October 2009. After winning the High School Hookup V2.0 from local radio station 97 BHT, the two members performed a free show in the auditorium.

For many years, all three high schools have offered and still offer sports in the Fall, Winter, and Spring that are open for all students to join and compete. Those sports include; cheerleading, cross country, field hockey, football, golf, boys' and girls' soccer, girls' volleyball, boys' and girls' basketball, swimming & diving, wrestling, baseball, softball, and track & field. No student is left without an activity.

The schools offer year-round clubs that students can sign up and participate in. The clubs offered range from High School specific clubs, such as the Elmprint Club and Colophon Club, to national clubs and organizations, such as F.B.L.A. and National Honors Society.

Meyers, for example, offers two clubs dedicated to publishing the school newspaper, Elmprint, and producing the yearbook, Colophon. Other clubs offered include the Art Club, Chess Club, Computer Club, Diversity Club, Drama Club, Envirothon, F.B.L.A., Key Club, Math Club, National Honors Society, Scholastic Scrimmage, Ski Club, Spanish Club, Speech and Debate, Stage Crew, Student Council, and Watershed Project.

In terms of musical groups, the schools offer chorus, jazz band, marching band, and orchestra.

Led by Attorneys Kim and Ruth Borland, and supported by many, the E. L. Meyers High School is known across the country for its speech and debate team. Founded in 1997, Meyers hosts the Martin Luther King Open Speech and Debate Tournament every January. The team was tied for a national championship with four other schools in 2009 at the National Catholic Forensic League championships held in Albany, New York.

The team offers students a host of events to choose to compete in. Some of the events that the team hosts include Lincoln–Douglas debate, policy debate, public forum debate, extemporaneous speaking, declamation, oral interpretation, original oratory, duo interpretation of literature, and dramatic interpretation.

**Notable Coughlin alumni** include the following plus a number of others as this list is incomplete:

**Dorothy Andrews Elston Kabis**, 33rd Treasurer of the United States  
**Jeff Cardoni**, composer of American Pie Presents: The Naked Mile, Open Season 3, and CSI: Miami (since 2002)

**Catherine Chandler**, poet

**Pat Finn**, host of The Joker's Wild from 1990–91 and Shop 'til You Drop (1991–94; 1996–98; 2000-2)

**Ham Fisher** (1918), cartoonist of Joe Palooka comic strip.

**James Karen**, actor.

**Bruce Kozerski**, former American football center in the National Football League for the Cincinnati Bengals

**Ron Solt**, former American football guard in the National Football League for the Indianapolis Colts and the Philadelphia Eagles

**Harold Rainsford Stark** (1940), U.S. Navy Admiral; Chief of Naval Operations (1939–42).

**James L. Nelligan**, Former Congressman from Pennsylvania's 11th Congressional District (1981-1983)

**Notable G.A.R. alumni** include the following plus a number of others as this list is incomplete:

**David Bohm** - Quantum physicist who was involved in the Manhattan Project.[citation needed]

**Mark James Klepaski**- Bass player for the rock band Breaking Benjamin.

**Greg Skrepenak**- Former NFL player and former Luzerne County Commissioner.

**Sam Savitt** - Author and illustrator, official artist of the U.S. Equestrian Team.[20]

**Bob Sura**- NBA player who last played for the Houston Rockets

**Robert Williams** - Quarterback for Notre Dame, 1956–1958

**Maurice Peoples** - Olympic sprinter, 1972

**Mark Glowinski** - NFL player for the Indianapolis Colts.

**Notable Meyers alumni** include the following plus a number of others as this list is incomplete:

**Qadry Ismail** – NFL Analyst, Former NFL wide receiver

**Raghib Ismail** – Former NFL wide receiver

**Edward B. Lewis** – Geneticist, Nobel Prize Winner (1995)

**Phil Ostrowski** – NFL player

**Dan Chariton** – Screenwriter

## Poor School Board Decisions

Why has the WBASB made the decisions it has? Perhaps it has to do with the board members motivation for being on the Board in the first place. Motives for serving on a school board are as diverse as the boards themselves. Many people get involved because they have children in school. Others are looking for a way to exert influence in their communities. Some are single-issue candidates, hoping to see schools adopt a particular curriculum, or come in line with a specific political ideology. There are also those who are merely attracted by the patronage possibilities the job offers.

Looking at the Big Toxic School Decision of this board, it could be concluded that the members of this board that voted for the huge consolidated school are in the latter group. Nobody knows but it sure explains a lot. Corruption is well known to the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board. Over the years, the Board and corruption have been tight friends, “There are also those who are merely attracted by the patronage possibilities the job offers.” The public has no idea what motivates the board but have concluded that it surely is not public service.

## Chapter 9 Three City High Schools = One Consolidation



40 yr. school? Looks like a Plasticville Model from the Outside

### The Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl is on its way.

When the consolidated / combined high school opens in Plains Township, the plan is that this huge complex nicknamed The Big Toxic School will replace this trio of historic but aging buildings, the newest of which will have passed its 90th anniversary. Of course the original Coughlin Wilkes-Barre High Building is over 110 years old. This new facility is expected by the current board to continue to serve the towns that joined with the city to form the Wilkes-Barre Area School District in the 1960s, giving up their own high schools in the process.

None of the current officials will be in office if something happens and the new school does not make it to its expected 40 year anniversary. With the debt on the taxpayers from The Big Toxic School if its lifetime ends at 30 years instead of 40 years, the taxpayers will be paying for two monstrosities at a time.

Save Our Schools mantra will never look so smart. Then again if the DEP or the EPA shuts the school down after one year of toxic fumes

and polluted water run-off, who pays for it all then? The impoverished taxpayers of Wilkes-Barre Area will be paying while the new board is scurrying to figure out how to repair Coughlin, GAR and Meyers again as permanent schools.

There will be a new name, new colors, a new mascot and a new alma mater. But the story, as it did when that first high school opened its doors in 1867, will go on unless it is stopped.

The groundbreaking for the new complex was held in April, 2020. There were some protestors who showed up at the event and your editor is pleased to have been one of them. Brian W. Kelly, one of your authors was one of them. This was the formal groundbreaking for Wilkes-Barre Area School district's new consolidated high school.



Groundbreaking Ceremony for New Wilkes-Barre Area High School

WNEP News sent Jessica Albert to cover the April 12, 2020 event, which was held on a Friday Morning.

The dozen or so protestors that showed up at the ceremony, were mostly from the Save our Schools organization. They had previously made known their concerns, being worried that the land the school is being built on could be harmful to students' health. Would you want your child to breathe air from a school built over a toxic mine site?



The site is on nearly 80 acres of old mining land that will be the location of Wilkes-Barre Area School district's new consolidated high school.

"It's just something that we've been striving for. We believe our students deserve something like this, our community deserves something like this," said Wilkes-Barre Area Superintendent Brian Costello. Please reread what motivated Costello or so he says in this paragraph.

Dr. Holodick cannot understand how any educator, let alone a superintendent can believe that our children deserve to attend a school where 5 states forbid schools to build even near, not to mention directly on top of a toxic dump. Besides that, building a large consolidated school is against the recommendations of scholarly research. Our own studies state that such a large central school is a disadvantage for the students we serve.

It may be understandable that a novice superintendent with a grand total administrative experience at the assistant principal level of just four years would think this is OK but a rational person looking at the concrete evidence would conclude the opposite. If anyone believes hiring an experienced professional is expensive, try hiring an inexperienced in-house person who is the end-product of a biased search (based on nepotism) and then evaluate the results.

It may be an excuse but it is a poor excuse. The result of a Big Toxic School at Chernobyl eliminating neighborhood community based schools and eliminating every high school in the major city, Wilkes-Barre, is simply unforgivable.

The new school will combine the district's three high schools into one. It's a project that has been controversial among some parents and several of them showed up to the groundbreaking to protest. They believe the land is not safe for students because it used to be a toxic mine and a dump. That spells poisonous water seepage and land subsidence in nearby homes.

It's very concerning," said parent Lois Grimm. "You wouldn't even be able to build a house on this property because of the levels that

they found in the soil but we're putting a school on it. I mean, that right there should give the school board members pause."

But the school board members have their own reasons, which they have not revealed. WNEP spoke with a representative from the DEP who are not held in high regard in the state of PA claim the land is safe to build on. That gives you an idea of how deep this conspiracy to defraud the people actually is.

"I think the school district has identified the site. They've studied it. They know what contamination is here and they have appropriate measures to deal with it to make it safe for reuse for a school," said DEP official Michael Bedrin. That is just rhetoric. Ask Bedrin if he would send his children to the Big Toxic School.

And, so there we have it, the portrayal of the 100 year academic history of the Wilkes-Barre School District, continued past 1972 when additional communities were brought in. During this period, the outstanding curriculum was way ahead of its time as the historic high schools delivered high quality education. That is now a vestige of the past.

## **Summary**

The coal miners took raw pride in their education system and they funded it to be excellent in its academic achievement and it was. But it is no longer. WBASD is a bottom dweller in the states ranking where the miners always assured top level academic achievement.

We can know how great it was by studying the depth of the damage over at least the last 50 years. Both the academic curriculum and the facilities were grossly neglected. The Board's official priorities during this period switched from the best in academics by not designing a curriculum to meet the demographics of the students enrolled. Instead the emphasis switched to sports. This final straw is the Taj Mahal toxic mine shaft high shifting its emphasis from academia to sports. This has taken a toll in just the first year playing as a jointure.

It is proven and proven again in WBASD, that less students have the opportunity to participate in sports in monster schools. Fewer athletes competed in varsity fall sports for the new Wilkes-Barre Area

Wolfpack when compared to the 2018-19 rosters of the three city high schools whose programs were consolidated this year. Despite the facts, school officials say the merger made more programs available for all students. More programs but less participants mean more kids on the bench if they choose to play at all.

Football roster totals in the final year of the three separate schools, according to figures provided by Wilkes-Barre Area athletic director Michael Namey to the local papers, showed 28 Coughlin, 38 Meyers and 23 GAR players (89 total). Boys soccer teams, meanwhile, had 30, 22 and 14 players at those respective schools (66 total).



## Chapter 10 Financial Failures



### **WBA School Board hammers nails into the Coffin of Common Sense**

Written by Brian Kelly and the London Times

An Obituary printed in the London Times.....Absolutely Brilliant!!

Many in Wilkes-Barre and surrounds are mourning the demise of the three City schools that have been doomed to the axe man as the school board cannot find a way to save our schools. It would be as if all common sense was stripped by Martians in their last journey to planet earth. How else can we explain it.

#### **From Wilkes-Barre's Citizens Voice.**

This piece was written by one of your book authors, Brian Kelly in 2015, and printed by the Citizens Voice (CV), a Wilkes-Barre Local Daily Paper. It is printed in this book exactly as it appeared in the paper in the Spring of 2015. As such, the names of then current Wilkes-Barre Area School Board members are used just as when the article was submitted to the CV for publication.

Since that time a number of Board Members have left and others have been defeated by members of the Save Our Schools (SOS) group and still others were caught in shenanigans and have gone to jail. When the board election comes again, SOS intends to have a majority of members on the board. Here is the obituary to Common Sense. Enjoy!

Today we mourn the passing of a beloved old friend, Common Sense, who had been with us for many years.

No one knows for sure how old he was, since his birth records were long ago lost in bureaucratic red tape. He will be remembered as having cultivated such valuable lessons as:

- Knowing when to come in out of the rain;
- Why the early bird gets the worm;
- Life isn't always fair;
- And maybe it was my fault.

Common Sense lived by simple, sound financial policies (don't spend more than you can earn) and reliable strategies (adults, not children, are in charge).

His health began to deteriorate rapidly when well-intentioned but overbearing regulations were set in place. Reports of a 6-year-old boy charged with sexual harassment for kissing a classmate; teens suspended from school for using mouthwash after lunch; and a teacher fired for reprimanding an unruly student, only worsened his condition.

Common Sense lost ground when parents attacked teachers for doing the job that they themselves had failed to do in disciplining their unruly children.

It declined even further when schools were required to get parental consent to administer sun lotion or an aspirin to a student; but could not inform parents when a student became pregnant and wanted to have an abortion

Common Sense lost the will to live as the churches became businesses; and criminals received better treatment than their victims.

Common Sense took a beating when you couldn't defend yourself from a burglar in your own home and the burglar could sue you for assault.

Common Sense finally gave up the will to live, after a woman failed to realize that a steaming cup of coffee was hot. She spilled a little in her lap, and was promptly awarded a huge settlement.

### **Common Sense was preceded in death;**

- by his parents, Truth and Trust,
- by his wife, Discretion,
- by his daughter, Responsibility,
- and by his son, Reason.

### **He is survived by his 5 stepbrothers;**

They are listed below:

- I know my rights
- I want it now
- Someone else is to Blame
- I'm a victim
- Pay me for doing nothing

At his funeral, to assure Common Sense would never return to disrupt plans to rip down the three long-serving high schools in Wilkes-Barre, the following seven of nine Board members showed up with nails and hammers:

- Louis M. Elmy
- Joseph A. Caffrey
- Ned J. Evans
- Dino L. Galella
- John R. Quinn
- Dr. James F. Susek
- Denise T. Thomas

Christine A. Katsock and Reverend Shawn Walker [A one-time ally of the people] came to aid Common Sense but were bullied and overpowered by a majority of the WBA School Board, who still believe the WBA voters will not throw them out of office for malfeasance and tyranny

I can see voters bringing multiple Stanley Claw Nail Pullers to the first board meeting after the November Election to remove the nails from the Coffin of Common Sense.

...

As a side note, not many attended the funeral of COMMON Sense because so few realized he was gone. Find Common Sense at the Save our Schools forum. We'd love to show him to you.

## **Summation: Holodick essay of May 18, 2018**

It is vital to 7000 students, the taxpayers and senior citizens to “hold elected officials accountable.” The belief of Save Our (neighborhood) Schools is that the education of all students is vital to our community. Neighborhood schools are vital to our city; the quality of education and the financial stability of the district. Safe/quality facilities and the aforementioned notions are fundamental to our citizens.

We need to hold elected officials accountable for a deplorable student state wide ranking; \$ six million spent with nothing physical to show for it, and a potential deficit of \$29 million dollars, without required construction; the destruction of historic “built to last forever” high schools due to neglect; the need to raise taxes to the max allowed by law just to cover errors and omissions.

Yes the district has been underfunded by the state, all the more reason to handle the funds you do have vigilantly. This impoverished city is on the re-bound with center city, the colleges and universities, riverfront, and sports/entertainment. Desperately needed is the restoration of our neighborhoods.



The Wilkes University study pointing to the growing neighborhood blight and a large number of family residents' homes for sale are vivid examples that the neighborhoods are heading in a reverse direction. We truly believe that the restoration of the neighborhood schools will be the needed beginning of bringing the neighborhoods back to what they once were. What is your opinion?

## **Parent comment at a recent board meeting:**

This comment is from back when COVID-19 had not appeared yet, and school board meetings were held indoors and attended by the public, the public in WBA spoke up with their comments levied against the WBASB over the decision to consolidate and build the boondoggle school over a toxic mine dump called Little Chernobyl.

There will be no tax base any longer in Wilkes Barre= no money for the school districts. It's a matter of financial survival.

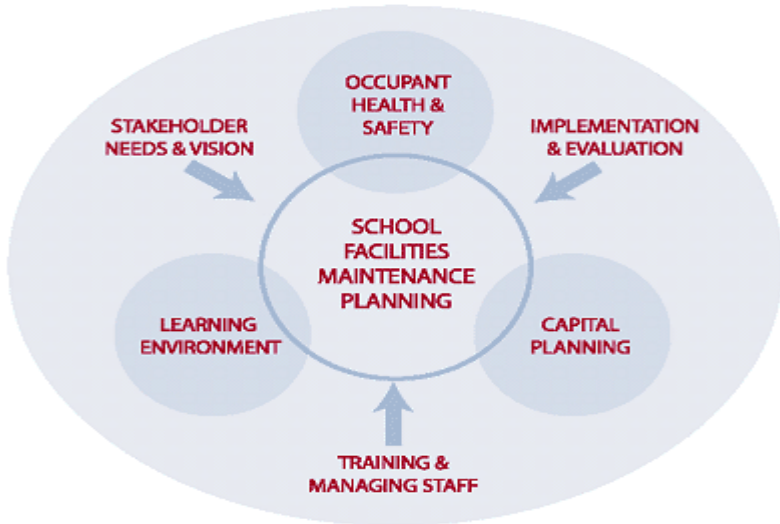
Don't these people realize you can't get blood from a stone? There is no money. Those days are gone when a board can spend spend spend and then tax the poor citizens. Much of this was caused by the cost of teacher pensions, which clearly need to be re-structured, etc..

In a poverty level district not doing due diligence to utilize existing facilities, no less historic facilities with a potential forever shelf life could easily run the district into educational and financial bankruptcy. The development of a plan to submit to the Pa. Department of Education that segregated the high school with the highest percentage of minorities and economically disadvantaged students constituted tacit racism and possible malfeasance in a public office. But the board is still unfazed.

The plan to build a consolidated school for 200 students on 2.7 acres, pictured on a prior page, when 35 acres is the recommended required space helped drain the treasury further. Planning a school downtown on a one-way narrow street; forbidden by zoning, and not waiting for zoning waivers cost the taxpayers \$6 million that the poor people in the Area did not and still do not have. It shows that this board treats taxpayer dollars like it owns a goose that produces golden eggs. One would think the board has a money tree but it doesn't. It just does not believe it needs to run a tight ship.



# Chapter 11 Facility Failures



Success Starts with Planning

If the School District's Building Assets, which by nature of their jobs, the Board and the Superintendent have sworn to care for, protect from harm, and maintain in top shape, were a human body, a look at the Act 34 report of deficiencies which we provide below would cause one to conclude that the study is over. There is no need to go on. The patient has died and he or she died a long time ago.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, that is how poorly the caretakers of the WBASD building properties have done their job. When you elected them as your board members, they stopped working for the people.

The beginning of this chapter is from the following report:

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# ACT 34 HEARING BOOKLET

Wilkes-Barre Area School District 730 South Main Street,  
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702



Concerning the construction of a New High School

Date: October 29, 2018

Time: 6:00 P.M.

Location: Cafeteria Leo E. Solomon - Plains Memorial Junior High School  
43 Abbott Street Plains Township, PA 18705

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The purpose of the Act 34 Hearing was to present and discuss all aspects concerning the construction of a New High School. This snippet concentrates on the deficiencies at Meyers and GAR High Schools. One would conclude that Coughlin is in worse shape as the WBASB has since decommissioned that school.

## EDUCATIONAL NEED FOR THE PROJECT

### **Background:**

Other than the renovations to the Edward Mackin school in 2016, the District has not had a new building or a major renovation project completed in since the Leo E. Solomon-Plains Memorial Elementary

and Junior High School project was built in 1996. The average age of the District's facilities is 65 years. The District currently operates five (5) K-6 elementary schools, one (1) 7-8 middle school, two (2) 7-12 Jr./Sr. High Schools, one (1) 9-10 high school, and one (1) 9-12 high school. A summary of the District's buildings is recited in a document called PlanCon A09, which can be researched.

**[http://wbcitizensvoice.com/pdfs/WBA\\_project.pdf](http://wbcitizensvoice.com/pdfs/WBA_project.pdf)**

Other than the Edward Mackin School, all of the remaining buildings need repairs and renovations to upgrade the facilities to current standards for continued use. Code deficiencies and accessibility compliance issues exist throughout the District's buildings. Many schools have undersized classrooms and aka overcrowded classrooms. They are hindered by insufficient electrical and data systems; have insufficient mechanical systems, and are not handicapped accessible. In addition, the schools do not provide adequate space and space relationships to meet contemporary educational standards or the District's educational programming requirements.

The basic problem is district management and the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board. There has never been a maintenance strategy or a plan to meet the needs of the district. And so, repairs are ordered only when the situation is dire. There is no preventive maintenance other than neglect.

### **Enrollment Growth:**

The average current size for each grade level ranges from 508 to 566 students with an average of 531 students per grade. Between 2019 and 2026 the PDE projections indicate a 7.8% increase in enrollment in grades 9-12.

PDE enrollment projections for the Wilkes-Barre Area School District are reproduced in Table 3.1 of the report. The projections are based on actual enrollments for December 2016. Projections through 2025-2026 are also listed.

District administration and personnel have indicated that, in general, they feel the district enrollment is growing. Interviews with district administration and personnel revealed a consensus that the PDE enrollment projections appear likely to occur.

District Board and administration have indicated that the current school facilities are inadequate to accommodate the projected growth and that the Project should provide a design capacity for the current average enrollment per grade level plus an amount for growth.

### **Current Building Conditions:**

The existing high school facilities have significant building deficiencies that make it difficult for the buildings to support the District's educational program. James M. Coughlin High School was closed due to safety issues and code deficiencies. Elmer L. Meyers Jr./Sr. High School and G.A.R. Jr./Sr. High School have systems that fail to comply with current codes and are energy inefficient. Meyers, in particular, has building systems that have exceeded expected life expectancies, would be expensive to replace, and are obsolete. A summary of the deficiencies follows. Please refer to the feasibility study for a comprehensive summary of building deficiencies.

#### ***Elmer L. Meyers Junior/Senior High School:***

The building continues to serve grades 7-12 through an expensive ongoing maintenance program. In recent years areas of the roof and portions of the water supply system to the building have been replaced; however, the building has not had significant renovations since it was originally constructed.

The building in its current configuration does not accommodate the District's educational program. Classrooms are undersized, toilet facilities are inadequate, and accessibility standards are not compliant with code. The District's educational programs cannot be accommodated without significant renovations to the space that would impact structural systems.

**Deficient Meyers items include: •**

- Windows have poor infiltration characteristics, poor operating functionality, and sub-standard insulating values
- Window caulking is failing
- Facades exhibit spalling and cracking
- Masonry, stone, and terra cotta veneers, headers, sills, and cornices are in poor condition and exhibit areas of deterioration and water infiltration
- Door hardware is not compliant with current accessibility standards
- Exit doors are not compliant with current accessibility widths
- Stair railings and guardrails are not compliant with current code
- Signage is not compliant with American with Disability Act (ADA) standards
- Toilet rooms are not compliant with ADA standards
- Interior finishes including flooring, ceilings, and walls show signs of the building's heavy use and are in need of repair and re-finishing
- Mechanical systems are obsolete and in need of complete replacement
- Mechanical ventilation is not compliant with current code
- Electrical systems are obsolete and in need of complete replacement
- Plumbing systems are obsolete and in need of complete replacement
- Select electrical equipment and lighting are in need of replacement
- Fire alarm pull stations are incorrectly mounted and there are no visual strobes for the hearing impaired
- The building is deficient in exit signage
- General purpose receptacles are inadequate and not compliant with current code
- Occupancy sensors should be added where appropriate to enhance energy efficiency
- Plumbing fixtures should be replaced with equivalent low-flow fixtures

- Site pavement and walks are in poor condition and entrances do not meet current accessibility standards
- Site walls and retaining walls exhibit areas of deterioration, cracking, and spalling
- Track has deteriorated and exhibits areas where the surface has detached from the asphalt base
- Security systems should be supplemented
- Kitchen equipment should be replaced and supplemented
- The gymnasium is undersized and inadequate to satisfactorily serve the current enrollment
- 67% of classrooms are below PDE's minimum area requirement of 660 SF
- Science labs are obsolete and do not have contemporary lab equipment
- Small group instruction areas should be provided
- Itinerant instruction areas should be provided
- Large group instruction areas should be provided
- Long distance learning areas should be provided
- Parking facilities are insufficient

If as much time was spent over the years by the Board, fixing problems at Meyers as they occurred, the time it took to retro-create this list could have all been saved. The maintenance philosophy of the board can be summarized in one word: N-E-G-L-E-C-T

### ***G.A.R. Junior/Senior High School:***

The building continues to serve grades 7-12 through an expensive on-going maintenance program. In recent years portions of the mechanical HVAC system have been replaced; however, the building has not had comprehensive renovations in several decades.

### **Deficient GAR items include:**

- Accessibility standards are not compliant with code.
- Windows have poor infiltration characteristics, poor operating functionality, and sub-standard insulating values



- Masonry, stone, and terra cotta veneers, headers, sills, and cornices exhibit areas of deterioration and water infiltration
- Door hardware is not compliant with current accessibility standards
- Stair railings and guardrails are not compliant with current code
- Signage is not compliant with American with Disability Act (ADA) standards
- Toilet rooms are not compliant with ADA standards
- Interior finishes including flooring, ceilings, and walls show signs of the building's heavy use and are in need of repair and re-finishing
- Portions of the mechanical systems are obsolete and in need of replacement
- Mechanical ventilation is not compliant with current code
- Portions of the mechanical controls are antiquated and should be replaced
- Portions of the electrical systems are obsolete and in need of replacement
- Portions of the plumbing systems are obsolete and in need of replacement
- Select electrical equipment and lighting are in need of replacement
- Fire alarm pull stations are incorrectly mounted and there are no visual strobes for the hearing impaired
- The building is deficient in exit signage
- General purpose receptacles are inadequate and not compliant with current code
- Occupancy sensors should be added where appropriate to enhance energy efficiency
- Plumbing fixtures should be replaced with equivalent low-flow fixtures
- Site walls, stairs, and retaining walls exhibit areas of deterioration, cracking, and spalling
- Site railings and guardrails should be replaced
- Security systems should be supplemented
- All exterior wall masonry should be repointed
- Limestone and brick parapets and limestone cornice should be rebuilt

- Limestone and steel lintels should be replaced and added in areas where deficient
- Lateral supports should be provided at cornice
- Terra cotta cladding should be removed and replaced
- Additional Science labs should be provided
- Small group instruction areas should be provided
- Itinerant instruction areas should be provided
- Large group instruction areas should be provided
- Long distance learning areas should be provided

If as much time was spent over the years by the Board, fixing problems at GAR as they occurred, the time it took to retro-create this list could have all been saved. The maintenance philosophy of the board can be summarized in one word: N-E-G-L-E-C-T.

A similar document could be produced for Coughlin but the WBASB has already thrown in the towel on the City's first and oldest high school. In fact when Coughlin was decommissioned recently, it was the oldest high school in the state of PA. It is still historically significant and should be save.

## **District Recommendations:**

Based on the building deficiencies, the inability of the buildings to adequately accommodate the District's educational program and the District's enrollment growth, and in consideration of the District's finances, the District intends to construct a new consolidated high school for the District's 9-12 student population.

District Administration directed the Architect to assist the District with developing a space program. The program incorporates the District's space needs into the new facility. The program is based on the District's curriculum goals over the next ten to twenty years.

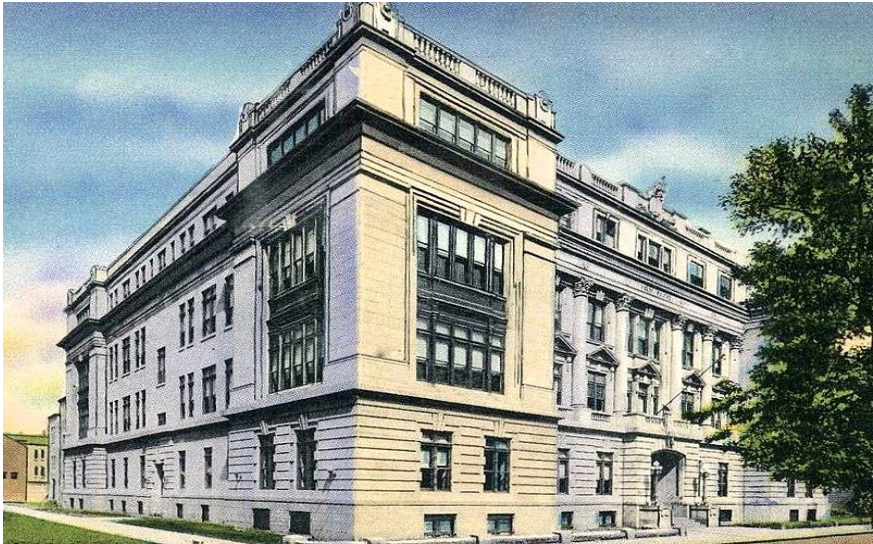
District administration considered the current and projected enrollment; its educational programs' objectives; the number, grouping, and nature of the students enrolled in the facility; spatial relationships within the facility and surrounding site; interrelationships between various programs and activities;

technological advances; and other provisions that would improve the learning environment and promote educational effectiveness and staff efficiency.

The population of Wilkes-Barre Area openly wonders why we should trust the current board of directors and the Superintendent to take care of a project with a cost from \$121 Million to A Half Billion Dollars over forty years. New construction is not as durable and will not have the shelf life of the schools that have already given their 90 to 110 year lives serving the district.



## Chapter 12 How All School Buildings Should Be Maintained.



Wilkes-Barre High School – later Coughlin – A one-time handsome building  
Later circa 1950 an Annex was built to its left.

In 2017 the school was closed and a big ugly fence built in front of it.  
This building can be restored and History would love it. My dad went to this school.  
He graduated Circa 1933



Here is the same school building in its patented school board ugly filthy regalia  
Picture by Kathleen Kelly

**Please don't forget that first and foremost nearly all evidence says don't consolidate schools because it harms academics, student sense of well-being, student participation, and it increases costs. Having said that, the consolidate toxic school site is receiving such attention because outside of perhaps Chernobyl, it would be difficult to find a worse spot to build a school.**

By the way, looking at the Coughlin building today, you can tell there has been no building maintenance plan whatsoever ever for Wilkes-Barre Area School District. And, that is not funny and has never been funny! That's why this book is needed. No consolidated school campus or other school would be needed if the Board had prudently executed an approved building maintenance program for all three City-based high schools before the damage of age set in.

Neglect creates a need to scrap the dilapidated buildings left in the wake of bad policies that produce inevitable results. Nobody thinks building a new school is a good idea if schools are maintained. Worse than that is the decision to build a Big Toxic School on top of a poisonous chemical coal ash laden mine dump. Who are we kidding? The board thinks it has hoodwinked the people. The people now know what the board is all about and have replaced offending board members as they come up for reelection. In one more election cycle, the old board will be gone, thankfully.

There is no maintenance plan and there never was in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. It's hard to believe. That is the cause of so many school buildings being in a dilapidated state. With a plan, all buildings would be in ship shape today and there would be no need for building a new school anywhere, especially not over a toxic mine shaft. Think about what happened. A Board that was derelict in its duty somehow got rewarded with a new school and the taxpayers got punished for not firing the Board when it had the opportunity in past elections.

## Is Good Maintenance an Essential Need? Absolutely yes!

Well operated school districts operate maintenance plans so that District buildings last as long as possible and they do not have to be replaced prematurely.

The fact is that without a reliable and routine planned maintenance program and a scheduled preventive maintenance plan, a school district cannot effectively maintain its facilities. The Wilkes-Barre Area School District can serve as the “poster child” for what happens when there is no policy other than *neglect*. The Wilkes-Barre School Board can swear truthfully that neglect does not work even if that is all you have.

A top-flight program cannot be a short-term commitment. Instead, it must be an ongoing continued work task, assessment of conditions, and the development and implementation of preventive and corrective measures. The results of such a program can affect the District’s facilities by a reduction of overall costs, lessening impacts on the educational process, providing stable conditions, increased years of reliable service, and the ability to adequately budget.

The advantages add up as students get a non-disruptive education and the District is never surprised by facilities-down situations that cost many dollars to bring back on-line.

### **Communication:**

Having a well-oiled maintenance plan helps all aspects of the District. The prime uses of such a program /plan are the development of adequate communication to assess each school and the condition of facilities on an ongoing basis. If the District officials are not checking the condition of the buildings regularly, how can they determine what is needed to keep them properly functioning? How will they know when to maintain any new refurbishments or new construction? How can they know how to set annual repair/replacement budgets? They can’t!

A well-developed program brings the schools' staffs and the districts' maintenance department together to find and resolve maintenance problems and to have a record of what has happened and needs to happen to make things better. It is very important that ongoing schools' staff and new employees understand how the system works and what part they play in its continuing operations..

### **Exceptional:**

Those in the WBASD understand that the many school shapes are unique and they are exceptional from other building types since they encounter intense use and the daily abuse of young occupants, who often do not necessarily care how they treat District assets. Thus, the schools deserve special design requirements and special monitoring. With such high human traffic in schools, there is more of a need for facilities to be up at all times than in a typical business.

Consequently, rigid standards and extra precautions are required to be taken to ensure life, safety, and building continuance. All buildings are seasonal but with long periods of use and short periods of limited occupancy though exceptions always do occur—and at the worst times—making backup plans even more important.

All of these factors make school maintenance difficult to do without interfering with the educational process and therefore lengthy maintenance tasks must often be done after school hours or during vacation periods.

Districts that ignore these requirements end up like the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. Over time school buildings become so out-of-repair that they need to be replaced as the neglect catches up with what a normal maintenance plan would provide. Simple repairs that are ignored can add up to a school needing to be replaced because of official negligence, which is often called deferred maintenance and the deferral is often permanent until a big issue arises.

### **Training and Development**

Ironically, there is no one person charged with assuring construction projects and assuring that buildings achieve needed repairs when needed. We already know there is no person who is responsible for



creating a maintenance plan. And, so in WBA, we have a situation in which nobody at all in the WBA campus knows anything about construction or building maintenance. It is not that Wilkes-Barre Area School District does not need such skills in-house, it is that the Superintendent and the Board have chosen to ignore the need and use neglect as the operative maintenance philosophy.

There are no architects or engineers on staff. Therefore any consultant can use the words of the trade to get the best of a superintendent or a custodian with whom they work. Prices paid to consultants when in-house expertise is unavailable are always top dollar.

The board for years has opted to “get by” without the right team of knowledgeable experts and craftsmen. The fact is a District such as ours with over \$300 million in real estate assets needs to be led by skilled professionals such as school district architects and / or competent engineers and this is just the first phase of assuring building assets last for their entire expected life. Getting all you can out of building assets saves the most money.

Consequently, building maintenance in school districts has grown to become a sophisticated process with new equipment, materials, and maintenance personnel required to have more technical skills to keep the major systems -- electrical, mechanical, and special systems in operation. To do this, nothing happens overnight. Instead, formal career path training must be offered and motivated individuals must be selected and the selected individuals must attend courses to increase their skills.



Is this the WBASD's Building Architect, or Engineer, or is it the Superintendent with a hard hat?

Continual education on the latest and evolving technical building issues is a base requirement. A District such as WBA that uses its skilled Academic personnel including its Superintendent (see picture on prior page) to perform such maintenance work is doomed to failure in both the academic side and the facilities side. Wilkes-Barre needs to replace almost all of its buildings and its academic achievement is among the worst in the state. I just proved my point. It's like lighting a candle at both ends. It only seems brighter for a short while before it burns you.

One of this board's greatest faults is that when the members took the oath to serve the people of WBASD, they promised to care for the \$300 million in district building assets. However, they reneged on their oath and instead neglected all maintenance. When the buildings began to crumble as expected, they cried for help from the people to bail them out. The people are out of money folks!

It is hard to believe that this same untrustworthy board actually want the people to trust them again with a new building expected to cost a \$HALF BILLION over 40 years. They hope to build something new—which of course will also have no maintenance plan for reaching its expected life. Yes, it is a shame. It is a sin.

But, it is the way this board operates. It would not change if we gave them a down payment of \$121 million for the new project. In 25 years, the new Lionel Plastic Ville Big Toxic School will need replacing. The Board thinks the taxpaying residents are all dummies. We are for sure if we do not watch everything they do and hold them accountable for all their cost overruns.

They never created a maintenance plan. It is hard to imagine until you see Coughlin and Meyers after their neglect.

There was no plan and there still is no maintenance plan. Moreover, there is no maintenance plan for the new building. If anything ever gets fixed today in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District, it is not part of an overall plan. It may not be an accident but it sure is not part of a major plan that would have been created to assure buildings last a long time.

Historically, our school district takes action only when absolutely necessary and never by plan. As witnessed recently with Mackin School, Meyers, and Coughlin, nothing happens until the disrepair reaches a point where a major renovation or a replacement project is the only option. You would not hire anybody from the WBASB to make sure your house is kept in good repair. Right?

Think about your own home for a minute. Say your only toilet breaks. When this happens, you fix it or have it fixed post haste. When your roof has a leak, you fix it. When the porch has a rotted plank, you fix it. When there is a hole in the plaster or sheet-rock wall, you fix it. You do not wait until you have to replace the whole house after ignoring small repairs brings your home to a beyond repair condition. Why should citizens of WBASD trust this board with new property worth well in excess of \$100 million? .

The school board for many, many years chose to operate without an appropriate qualified maintenance staff headed by somebody who understands all aspects of the building trades. I am talking about a competent architect or engineer such as those employed by Scranton University or Misericordia University and the other colleges in this area. The school superintendent, though perhaps a gritty and feisty administrator is not competent in the trades, nor should he or she

have to be competent in the skills of building and grounds maintenance. Actually, with our school district last in academic achievement testing in the state, perhaps our Super should not even be in charge of academic achievement.

From all observations of the WBASB, the Superintendent himself uses his cronies in the trades industry without first having long-term maintenance contracts to solve issues as they arise. Whether plumbing, carpentry, electrical or other emergencies that the custodial staff is not prepared to handle, the superintendent is forced to get involved to contract with a favored cadre of cronies or perhaps relatives to get a problem resolved. Otherwise, the problem will be neglected, get worse, and be unsolved and be more serious when the next emergency comes around.

There is a position needed in school districts called solicitor. In most jurisdictions, a school district solicitor must be a practicing lawyer. There generally is no special license or other registration required. Often, a school district solicitor will work in a private law firm if the activities are not full-time. In this case, the school district will contract with the lawyer or firm for the services. In other instances, particularly with larger school entities such as WBA, the school district may employ its own in-house counsel to act as solicitor.

WBA pays a huge amount of money for a contract solicitor. Instead of having a young attorney for example, making \$30,000 to \$50,000 per year who learns and understands the business in the district, WBA pays a huge amount and has no in-house skills. When an in-house attorney serves as solicitor, he or she can use contract services as the exception rather than the rule. Without such an employee, the Superintendent is the go-between to the contract solicitor.

Since calling in outside help, even if part of a friend or crony team, puts stress on the budget (if there is one), it is likely that the Superintendent might choose to postpone actual repairs. The Wilkes-Barre Area Super uses that approach. More than likely, like, me, you have gone into a district school, and found a sign on the restroom door asking you to find another toilet someplace else in the building. It is a common occurrence.

A sign can be reused and is lots cheaper than fixing a problem when it occurs. I bet you have found signs calling out other issues and perhaps dangers in our schools. Signs are cheaper than repairs but using signs v repairs is not a good building maintenance practice.



Front Entrance particle board and PVC mirror the same look at the side entrance of Meyers

You might have gone into Meyers High School for example, over the last several years underneath a maze of particle board built to protect passersby from falling building material. For a school board hell-bent on making Meyers look like a school needing to be torn down, adorning the entrances with cheap blue painted particle board surely does the trick. The intricate PVC pipe maze adds an additional aura of incompetence to the overall picture of the front of what otherwise would be a beautiful school entrance. The temporary fix must have become permanent recently but it sure is ugly.

If the board wants Meyers to look bad, shoddy work like this is a sure way to do it. It makes the school look to be in worse shape than it really is. It is the product of a patchwork quilt maintenance philosophy that no competent craftsman would recommend.

Why would the superintendent spend the money to fix something needing the proper expertise—such as say a plumbing issue, when he or she has a private Water Closet tucked handily away in his or her own comfortable and private office. The point in this chapter is

simply that without a well-conceived, written maintenance plan available, nobody can ascertain problems of any nature. How could they ever be fixed with no system in place. We have demonstrated that the Wilkes-Barre Area School District uses *neglect* as its only maintenance philosophy. That is very obvious. A management philosophy that uses neglect as its mantra is a sign of incompetence.

This is how buildings, including school buildings, without a plan for their ongoing regular maintenance eventually fall into a state of complete disrepair and begin to look so shabby that inspectors might suggest ripping them down and building new buildings rather than investing in significant repair work.

Toilets are a good example of which we can all relate. Neglect causes one broken toilet on one floor to become two broken toilets on two floors until there is only one functional toilet left in a building. Then what? Well, then the wise men in charge declare the problem unsolvable and decide to move all school operations to another building with functional latrines.

Whether the issue is broken toilets, weak beams, leaky roofs, falling plaster, exposed asbestos, missing floor sections, eventually, the list of *to-be-fixed* items becomes so great that the Board Superintendent decides to punt rather than deal with an area outside his or her expertise. Punting is a regular occurrence in the Superintendent's office play-book.

In school districts that have spent the time to construct a maintenance plan and have hired an in-house staff with expertise to use the preventive maintenance plan, as a rule, holes do not appear in floors and toilets do not break all of a sudden. Instead, buildings last and do not need replacing after a few maintenance incidents.

Deferred repairs quickly can turn into replacement events. Colleges with many buildings on campus have the same issues as school districts. Stanford University recently published a report titled "Guidelines for Life Cycle Cost Analysis," which explains how as a building or campus ages, the cumulative cost of operating and maintaining facilities significantly impacts the overall budget — not just the maintenance budget.

Even when funds are set aside to construct new buildings, they rarely extend to the ongoing operational costs vital to maintaining the facility and slowing the decline of building utility and performance.

In other words, deferred maintenance is a sure way of increasing long-term building costs. The best approach is to fix it before it is broken through a preventive maintenance program. But, you need a team of artisans to do that. The team costs lots less in the long run, however, than not having the team.

The greater issue with deferred maintenance is that it grows in scope — and cost — the longer it is prolonged. *Don't put off 'til tomorrow what you can do today.* This is a lesson still unlearned by the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board (WBASB).

When a repair is delayed, it is still subject to the daily use and abuse of school occupants. Students do not stop coming to school because a toilet is down or a light is out or a floor is overly slippery. In fact, it's not uncommon for a “repair” to turn into a “replacement” because, in the process of being deferred, it becomes completely broken.

Replacing a door, lock, window, etc., is much more costly than simply repairing it in a timely manner. But not only is the expense higher, there is also a frequently overlooked cost in staff productivity as replacements typically take much longer to complete than repairs.

When whole buildings need to be replaced because of excessive neglect, the costs grow out of the affordability range of most taxpayer bases. Sometimes a School Board chooses not to take the resources of the taxpayers into consideration as is the case with WBASB.

On the other hand, buildings and facilities that have implemented comprehensive preventive maintenance programs have found that the operation of their systems is more reliable, and those systems also last longer and cost less in the long run.

## Preventative maintenance measures

Projects that are put on hold, repair that is neglected, or maintenance that is ignored adds up to a costly and complex problem. The cost of deferred maintenance could potentially be 30 times that of the early intervention cost. From what we have seen with the notion of a new consolidated high school in Plains Twp., there is still no overall plan nor a preventive maintenance plan in place and unless it is a secret, the board has not discussed increases in the quality and quantity of maintenance personnel.

There are no architects or engineers in the hiring pipeline to make sure construction and maintenance is performed safely and appropriately. The youthful Superintendent appears to be the only one checking out the construction site. And, that is not good. When the Superintendent is in the field checking construction, is someone from the custodial staff doing his Superintendent job?

And, so, what can we expect long after the current board is out of office *say in* twenty or thirty years? God forbid! Will their new consolidated Taj Mahal built on a mine shaft be ready to be replaced because with no assigned maintenance personnel and no plan, it will have been neglected? For the current board it may not even matter. Nobody will be around for the folks of 2050 to blame for their continued imprudent maintenance philosophy. This board has no plans to make maintenance better so they must be fired. It is that simple.

What I am saying is that the importance of preventative maintenance cannot be overstated. If this current board were better caretakers of the real estate assets of the District, there would be no need for a major repair project and certainly no need for a huge high school consolidation project designed to bankrupt a community.

Experts estimate that between two and six percent of an annual operating budget should be spent on preventative maintenance in order to effectively minimize a facility's rate of decay. Quality building materials such as granite as was used in proper high school buildings before 1950, is hard to come by within budget but the buildings would surely last longer with top-grade materials. Besides



materials, prevention not only saves money, but it helps facilities avoid replacement — which requires capital assets and often creates an extensive process from evaluation and design to funding and implementation.

By nature, preventive maintenance is the least disruptive, singular in resolution, planned for in advance alternative and often includes training for future maintenance. Most of all, it helps reduce building failure and poor conditions that can negatively impact mission critical building operations, a school district's image, student results and retention, energy efficiency and even employee morale.

Nobody would expect a school district to operate without a boss. In other words it goes without saying that a person schooled in curricula and the proper ways of running a school's academic programs, most often called a Superintendent is an obvious necessity in order to operate a school. A multi-school menagerie of buildings at various grade levels called a school district is even more of a challenge. The board would without question be fired if it chose not to hire a Superintendent.

Yet, somehow, the same board would permit a superintendent with no expertise in toilets or leaky roofs, or structural issues or electrical or flooring to be the top maintenance person serving as the facility engineer or architect. How can that be? If the superintendent is serving as the maintenance director then there is no Superintendent when the top academic boss available is not wearing his superintendent hat. That is why WBASD is at the bottom of the state's rankings in academic achievement.

The Superintendent, brilliant though she or he may be, cannot be an expert in all things. A board in fact that permits dual roles is itself incompetent. How can they permit the extremely high paid young Superintendent to perform maintenance decision making and the hiring of contractors and subcontractors and the monitoring of large multi-year projects?



Brian Costello (by title, Superintendent) in his work as WBASD Architect/Engineer

How many pictures do we need to see of superintendent Brian Costello checking out the Plains work site? By the way, what an ugly site! Is the academic record of the District so high that a Superintendent doing Superintendent work is not necessary? No, WBASD is ranked 443rd out of 500. How can the Superintendent know the construction or repair work is done properly when it is commissioned and finished? Answer. They cannot. That's why buildings enter a state of disrepair far too often when nobody with knowledge is taking care of them.

By the way, at 443<sup>rd</sup>, the Wilkes-Barre Area School District is a lot closer to the bottom of the pack academically than the top. Perhaps the "Super" serving as the only architect/engineer on maintenance projects has already taken its toll.

## **Universities / colleges similar to school districts**

When book editor Brian Kelly was with IBM, one of his roles was to serve as the Higher Education Coordinator for IBM working with the ten colleges/universities in Northeastern PA. In this role he was trained to understand how academic institutions were structured and

how they operated. He was trained to know what made them tick to help them choose IBM equipment over Brand X.

In his own technical consulting business after he retired from IBM, he had the pleasure of directly supporting Marywood University and College Misericordia and occasionally he would perform technical consulting work for other Northeastern PA academic institutions.

Marywood had an outstanding in-house maintenance team. You can still see the results of their fine work all over their beautiful campus. They not only did the normal construction monitoring and facilities job, they also employed craftsmen who remodeled and repurposed facilities for new uses.

For example, this team took the one room Information Technology Department of 1970 and over forty-plus years, Kelly observed them build several new data centers and a new state of the art department with private offices for their analysts, programmers et al. This team was led by a lead Architect/Engineer. When the cost of furniture was high or did not fit the room space, the craftsmen designed and built their own furniture and the result was always first-class. Besides being a great university, he was very impressed with the results of their maintenance team

College Misericordia's facilities maintenance crew were also under the control of an architect when he served as the chief computer technology officer on campus. They had a maintenance plan and were always painting or refurbishing a given area on campus. To save dollars, as the college became a university and expanded their academic programs, they chose to subcontract out their maintenance department while keeping the in-house architect, who reported to the President. The preventive maintenance plan was even more important when the department was outsourced.

Scranton University was not an IBM customer but Brian had a friend who happened to live in South Wilkes-Barre who at one time served as the Architect on the University's many projects. He now serves with the team as a member of the Save Our Schools Group. Scranton U was always building something and everything that they built needed a maintenance plan.

On the University's web site, they tell something about their current team.

*“Our Design and Construction department is a service organization responsible for the engineering, planning, documentation, construction, renovation, repair, and maintenance of all University buildings and facilities.”*

So, why did I just go through the similar methods three different educational institutions use to assure their buildings and facilities are all operational all the time? I have never seen an organization in higher education that did not have an Architect or a maintenance plan. Like the colleges, with \$300 million in real-estate assets

WBASD cannot function without the expertise of an architect and a well-orchestrated maintenance plan and a staff of building artisans. They kid themselves to think they can. When they write their facilities checks, I will guarantee they are higher than if they had a planned maintenance approach.

Moreover, Kelly cannot recall any buildings ever being ripped down on a local college campus because of their maintenance team's neglect. The Wilkes-Barre Area School Board should have employed these same practices as the small colleges in NEPA and it should employ them in the future regarding maintenance and construction projects. \$300 million or more in assets is an awful lot of real property to neglect and ultimately waste.

Whereas WBASB thinks construction planning and control and preventive maintenance are fine when relegated and deferred to the back burner as *afterthoughts*,” organizations that are proper caretakers of their hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of real property assets see facilities management as a vital and even strategic part of their organizations. Without the buildings on campus, how can there be an educational institution? There cannot.

The WBASB and its superintendent have chosen not to use generally accepted facilities management and preventive maintenance procedures. And so, the result is that the long-term health of their facilities has not been assured. That is why at WBASD, buildings like

Mackin School in its day, and now Coughlin, GAR & Meyers, are always facing a handy emergency that must be solved or all will be lost.

So, here we are in late 2020, after a number of false starts and blocked decisions about what the board can and should do regarding its ever-changing plans to eliminate Coughlin, GAR, & Meyers—all three City High Schools. This board wants all Wilkes-Barre students to take the bus every day of every school year to their Consolidated Mine Shaft High. What a shame.

And so, since the sane citizens of Wilkes-Barre Area are not suicidal and do not wish to bring on taxpayer bankruptcies by overtaxing themselves or others in the area, many have joined the Save Our Schools Group. This organization is determined to do what is right for the community, regardless of the tyranny, malfeasance, and incompetence of the tyrants serving as members of the board of directors.

The idea of abandoning the notion of neighborhood schools for the *one big school fits all idea* has never made the taxpayers, parents or students happy or better off wherever it has been implemented and it is not about to work here. Moreover, from their lousy track record when trusted with major property assets, this board and its young Superintendent put forth clear proof they cannot handle such a big decision. It is a bungle boondoggle as proposed.

Please consider that they have been serving as the caretakers who permitted all ten of these schools to be neglected and fall into a state of disrepair. Why would anybody with a choice if this consolidated coal-ash toxic-fill monstrosity is forced upon us all, vote to retain this bunch of irresponsible, careless derelicts, whose actions mimic those of imbeciles. Would we not expect that they would take a 40-year school as the Plains school is expected to be, and have it torn down in 25 years. It is their MO.

Just look at the history of the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board and you will believe they are the worst custodians of taxpayer property there could ever be. The secret folks is to vote them out of office as soon as possible. Moreover, anybody who knows an official in the

state government, please give them a copy of the Big Toxic School 2019 book as well as a copy of this book so they can believe it is bad and so that they can stop these renegades in their tracks. That is what this book is all about. The people do not need a School Board full of tyrants who find no problem with figuratively spitting in the public taxpayer's faces. We can do better!

## Chapter 13 What About the Three Wilkes-Barre High Schools?



Dr. Mark Schiowitz, who, before he decided to spend his time on medical projects, (Mark is a bona fide excellent surgeon) was once on the WBA Board of Directors. He is a person who would surely help us all fight the anti-public board of today. Mark is a great ally for the entire area.

At a recent meeting before Taj Mahal aka The Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl construction began, Dr. Schiowitz urged the Board to keep the three smaller schools as "students learn best in high schools of less than 1000 students."

One asks "Why did Shawn Walker a board member who once had similar thoughts, change his mind?" Walker's and Schiowitz's ideas need to get more traction? Why is the WBA School Board always in such a rush to do the wrong thing?

Never let a good crisis go to waste! The public may not always be willing to pay for good planning but if politicians can create a crisis--real or perceived, a good-hearted public can be more easily manipulated into rushing into a bad decision to support the elected. Often power brokers make their decisions and then shape the facts to support their choice-- not necessarily for the good of the public.

Did the School Board make a decision to rip down the schools before all of the analyses even began? I surely don't know the answer but it appears that there is no will in the WB Press corps to reevaluate this destructive idea. Who are we kidding here? Why does the Board want to build something out of Wilkes-Barre before it even knows what it will build or where it may need to build it?

How did WB Area come from deciding what to do about the three existing high schools to almost definitely preparing to build a new consolidated high school on Washington St. in downtown WB? And, by the way, all of us know that if a new school were to be built, the best locale would have been the unused and spacious Murray Complex. And so this site was summarily eliminated from consideration. Hah! As the kids in the neighborhood would ask: How come?

The reality is that anybody not staring greedily at Tom Wolfe's big pocketbook would conclude that building a new Plasticville model 25-40 year duration school is not the answer to anything. Hey for younger officials, in 25 years, they could get to create a new crisis and build a new school again!

In the thick of the turmoil, though I may not get credit, I dis spell out the best plan for the School District. It would be called *No new consolidated school*. How much would it cost? Answer: It would cost just one to two million dollars per year. Not \$121 million right now and \$.5billion over 40 years.

Yet, not one person asked me or Dr. Holodick about it in the six months since the book was published. I had even made "Save our Schools," one of my campaign initiatives in my 2015 losing bid to become the Mayor of Wilkes-Barre. I hoped to again bring the idea to the minds of the public and the school officials. Yet, nobody asked me about it one time during the duration of the campaign. People like leading their own unencumbered lives. Nonetheless, building a new school was not needed. Ripping down Coughlin, GAR, and Meyers was the worst that could happen for Wilkes-Barre. All of Wilkes-Barre knows that.



When nobody seeks real input from those with opposing views it typically means the fix is in. This fix will fix it real good for Wilkes-Barre once again. Real good! Does anybody really care? I have always thought that taxpayers and parents ought to be incensed at what is happening with this Toxic School built outside of the city limits on Little Chernobyl Mountain.

The building of such a nasty edifice happens with the citizens money and our children's lives that these presbyopic, uncaring leaders are toying with. Why not do the right thing for the constituents?

One thing we should not do is let Governor Tom Wolfe bully us into making a decision too quickly. We know that haste makes waste; and we are about to waste some wonderful and historically significant school traditions and school buildings—Meyers, GAR and the vacant shell of the Coughlin building—the oldest historical school in PA before it was put to pasture.

Moreover, in the process it seems we are willing to sacrifice the opportunity for our children to attend smaller and better run community neighborhood schools and be better educated and be happier than in bully-prone mega schools.

Those who grew up in the sixties know as they think of all of the kids from Larksville, Newport, Swoyersville, Pringle, and Plymouth, PA that things did not improve when the politicos took over.

Why? because of the huge Wyoming Valley West jointure many kids never got to play high school sports or never got to be a big fish in a small pond or never got to see how their voice would matter in a setting of their peers. Is this what we really want for Wilkes-Barre Area kids? We almost have it unfortunately.

By the way. Do we really know what we want? Where is the education plan? What does the new curricula look like? Where is the quality of life plan for the school children? Where is the best option plan? The Super and the board figure they do not have to tell us what is happening even as it affects our lives and the lives of our children.

Where there's a will, there is a way. We can surely build anything we want, even a school on top of a toxic mine, Little Chernobyl, if it is the right thing to do. We must first know what we want. Don't let them kid you? It starts with dreams, and then ideas, and then plans, and then, and only then does it move to action.

Why is nobody dreaming about the ideal situation for Wilkes-Barre Area, the School Children, and the Taxpayers? Does a future with no Coughlin; no GAR; and no Meyers seem like a good idea. Does climbing to the top of Mount Plains sound like an attractive idea for each day after wake-up? How many busses will it take?

For now, we must decide what our will is in this debacle? My suggestion is that we had better stop this poorly planned project and do some real planning before we take another step in any direction. Our first loss is our best loss. Stopping it later when WBASB can't get an occupancy permit will cost the taxpayers even more.

Having said that, no immediate decision is always better than a bad decision. Let's not be bullied by the big bad Wolf! If the politicians were not pushing us, what would we want. Taking a bus every day to a Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl or walking to a neighborhood school close to where we grew up?

Besides the undesirability of the poisonous school on top of a mountain outside of Wilkes-Barre, aren't community neighborhood schools more desirous and more fun than mega cluster consolidated jointures where group think not individual thinking rules every day.

Your authors have taken a specific position when all this talk began in 2014. Besides suggesting that kids should not have to take the bus to a huge compound consolidated school, Brian Kelly and Richard Holodick's solution to the high-school crisis as written focused on the fact that destroying things is very permanent, especially if it does not further our educational goals.

Try this saying on for size:

## Special landmarks do not have to be destroyed

The board has pegged the fixes required for WBA School District high schools with a depiction of being *un-affordable by taxpayers* regardless of the approach -- fix it or demolish and build it again cheaper. But this is not true.

I don't think so. I don't buy it. It would have been interesting if the numbers and "plans" had been presented at the Wednesday's Board meeting in December 2014 along with the impact on millage. The people remain uninformed even as the Taj Mahal is being built.

We all know the school district has not been a tax bargain for local taxpayers ever. Build or not, the board plans another millage increase this year and next year and next year and the next. Taxpayers know we are going to get burned.

More importantly for all of us living in Wilkes-Barre Area, the question should be, "Do we really want to destroy historically important well-built school buildings and replace them with cheap quality twenty-five year models?" Your author who is a train aficionado sees this as adopting a Plasticville school to replace a marble / granite structure.

Wilkes-Barre High was a marble granite building. The school was established in 1890. It later was renamed Coughlin High after GAR opened in 1925. This old Coughlin school building until decommissioned by our board, was in fact the **oldest public high school building in Pennsylvania**. It was built to last.

The shell of the building is still on North Washington St. Can you believe some people want to tear down the oldest public school building in the State? The Historical Society is not for it folks! The Coughlin Annex structure, next to the marble and granite building was built in 1952.

The original Coughlin building was occupied in 1909 though construction had begun much earlier. Citizens of Wilkes-Barre Area need to get involved and think about what is being proposed and we

must ask ourselves if there are not better ways to solve this problem without doubling our already un-affordable school tax burden.

In March, 2005 Cliff Greim may have heard about our plight. Even if not, he wrote an excellent piece titled **New Construction vs. Renovation for Older School Facilities**. Though ten years old, it still covers the issue quite well. It is available for all to read at <http://www.facilitiesnet.com/educationalfacilities/article/School-Choice-Build-New-or-Not--2639#>

Greim offers readable counsel on the big decision for WBASD:

"Generally, schools built in the 1950s or earlier have impressive architectural character and often are fixtures in their neighborhoods. They are structurally sound and can accommodate new systems. In addition, there is often strong sentiment to keep them in some form. Still, Wilkes-Barre Area has three such schools in the City of Wilkes-Barre until the Plains Twp commissioners offer the School District and occupancy permit a year or so from now. I am praying they won't offer it.

Greim cites in his paper that "Newer schools built in the 1960s and 70s generally lack architectural character, are not energy-efficient and are constructed of cheaper materials. These get torn down more often or become hand-me-down conversions from high schools to junior highs or from junior highs to elementary schools." Plasticville train schools made by Lionel may have more useful life than the consolidated Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl.

All of the buildings in question (Coughlin, GAR, and Meyers were built pre-1950 other than the Coughlin Annex, which was built in 1952. I think it is safe to say that the same logic Greim discusses for pre-1950 buildings applies to the Coughlin Annex.

I admit I was taken back by board members at a recent in-person meeting who said, "It's going to cost a lot but it's something we have to do." I would ask whether they would vote to tear down historic Independence Hall if it were within their responsibility back in 1860 when it was just over 100 years old. It helps to know that at that time, this famous Philadelphia structure was about the same age as Coughlin was about the time of its retirement?

We all know that Independence Hall is the birthplace of America. We also know that the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were both debated and signed inside this remarkable building. Independence Hall was built between **1732** and 1756 to be the Pennsylvania State House. It still stands and thrives. Why can Philadelphia preserve a monument and Wilkes-Barre cannot?

Originally, this building housed all three branches of Pennsylvania's colonial government. Yes, it was built even before the USA became the USA. It is now two and a half times older than Coughlin High School and it has a lot of life left. Hopefully, you have been there and you also got a glimpse of the one and only Liberty Bell. Hopefully the WBASB would not rip down a famous WBA school bell if one could be found?

Think of the famous graduates of Coughlin, GAR, and Meyers, and think of all the memorable events at those schools. These buildings are special landmarks in our home area, and they do not have to be destroyed.

GAR is almost ninety years old and Meyers is the baby at just more than 85 years of age. Why would we give up these historically significant well-built structures and replace them with thirty-year throwaway square buildings made of sheet metal, plastic, and other cheap materials? We have historical buildings with grand designs, granite and limestone interiors, and exquisite stained glass auditoriums. Who are we to cast this all away so that in twenty years another study like this can be done as we rip out the structures to be built and go with even cheaper buildings with twenty-year lifetimes or perhaps a modular school or a few trailers.

Where there is a will, there is a way. Somehow Wilkes-Barre residents lost our will with the Sterling Hotel's elimination after spending \$6 million without fixing the roof. Let's keep our will and our wits this time as the board tries to shove a huge millage increase our way... for a less desirable outcome than the status quo.

One off-hand suggestion I have is to allocate about a million dollars or two or perhaps three if we can afford it while saving \$121 million in construction costs.

We can bring in a great building contractor from our area to hire and allocate five or ten artisans just for WBA, to begin work on these buildings, one year at a time, one objective at a time. Let's get the hazards out of the way first. When real emergencies occur in the other buildings, we can dispatch this crew of experts along with WBA maintenance personnel to fix the problems post haste. All immediate maintenance would be done immediately while a plan for maintaining all the District's buildings can be built concurrently.

I would also use our political representatives to get waivers for any safe beams that can withstand lateral forces. Removing such structural pieces is a very costly undertaking and should be ruled out immediately.

Clearly all of the WBA buildings in question have not been blown over by big puffs of wind in the 85 to 105 years in which they have been standing and they are not going to be blown over tomorrow or any time soon.

I would also try to get waivers for increasing the physical size of the classrooms. They seem big enough to have been able to be used for conducting classes for many years and surely they could continue to be used. Waivers would save a lot of money and they are practical and safe.

I would bet that the local and state historical societies would help in gaining the waivers. How can we consider destroying such history in three marble and granite forever buildings that have lasted at least 85 years, for a promise we know will be broken thirty years from now. After all, citizens make the laws. If the laws do not fit, waivers are a good way to save money and still have the benefits of a safe school.

When all the emergencies are fixed, I would put the new team of artisans to work on one floor at a time of one building at a time. I would use as many vocational students to help in the effort as possible. Think of the training they would get.

Additionally, Wilkes-Barre Area also has a lot of maintenance / custodial personnel, who I bet would love to learn new skills working with the best artisans in the valley in building, plumbing, electrical, carpentry and other endeavors. Where there is a will, there is a way. Nothing in life truly worth having is easy. Why give up the best for a fake solution—Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl—that may not even be good enough to be second-best?





# Chapter 14 The Absurd Problems of Wilkes-Barre Area



Every book must have a plot. The plot for this book is to identify the serious problems that have been part of the history of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District as managed by what an honest evaluation would say is an incompetent at best or corrupt, at worst, school board. This book is needed so that the identified problems can be solved in the most appropriate manner.

**Let's get this "problem" chapter started right here!**

What is the problem? As noted in Chapter 2, the purpose of this book is motivated first of all by three movies.

The first movie, "Bad Education," stars Hugh Jackman  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bad\\_Education\\_\(2019\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bad_Education_(2019_film)).

It is the true story of the Roslyn School District on Long Island New York where millions of tax dollars were stolen. The movie has been well received. Though it makes one think a bit of Wilkes-Barre Area in its highlighting of board and top official corruption, The WBA tale makes "Bad Education" look like a Disney cartoon.

Luzerne County, the home of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District is infamous for another true movie titled “Kids for Cash.” In this story, two judges took kick-backs for every juvenile that they incarcerated in private detention centers. Maybe it is something in the area water?

Their objective was to increase occupancy at the for-profit detention centers in which they were highly invested. The judges were known for disposing of thousands of children for extended stays in youth centers for offenses as trivial as mocking an assistant principal on Myspace or trespassing in a vacant building. Until mid 2020, both judges were in the Big House. They may be there for some time to come.

The third motivator to fight the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board (WBASB) is another movie from March, 2000. This movie, is titled *Erin Brockovich*. It is a true story starring the famous Hollywood actress Julia Roberts.

Brockavich fought against the energy corporation Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E). When she began digging into the case, she found evidence that the groundwater in the town of Hinkley had been seriously contaminated with carcinogenic hexavalent chromium. This happens to be the same type of carcinogen found in the building site for the WBA Big Toxic High School. However, she also discovered that PG&E had been telling the public lies that their water contained a safer form of chromium. Eventually, Brockavich and the town won the case.

There are many “experts” and supposed experts who have told the citizens of WBA that there is no chemical waste problem. Sure! Contract solicitor Ray Wendeloski who in most years pockets \$195,000 from the taxpayers assumes chemical expert status at times, Ray has no sympathy. He says that a student would have to dig down six inches and swallow the soil there to get sick from the chemical waste that is all over the site. How about serving that meal for your family Ray? Safe?

In all three of the other cases, the public won and so the Save Our Schools (SOS) group is continually encouraged by these movies to tell the story of the long-time corrupt Wilkes-Barre Area School

Board. Obviously this active group (SOS) is seeking a resolution for the School Board's malfeasance and misfeasance and is working to make its record four for four on selected movies. The win would mean a safer environment for students, faculty and maintenance personnel as well as the Plains Twp. neighbors who deal with the toxic runoff and the subsidence.

Now, let's talk some more about this toxic, poisonous story. It helps to remember as we recount this, that Wilkes-Barre Area School Board did not have to build a school on a toxic mine site. It did not have to select Little Chernobyl. It was a problem which they could have easily avoided. In fact, they had to go through great pains in order to make their ruse all seem legitimate.

Nonetheless, with many better choices to be had, the board chose the Big Toxic School Site at Little Chernobyl. Just one of those reasons was to spite Wilkes-Barre PA for not granting them a permit on their first opportunity to make money on the deal.

In the Brockavich story summary above, you recall that PG&E told the residents of Hinkley that the hexavalent chromium was at a very light level. It is exactly what SOS and Wilkes-Barre Area has been told by the legal folks from the WBASB.

In March 2020, as testing continued during construction, Michael Krzywicki of Apollo Group Inc., the district's building project manager, paid under a contract, gave a report on the project at a Monday Board meeting. He was quick to say that lab results showed no detectable amount of hexavalent chromium, a carcinogen often found in coal ash. "No Detectable" HmMMM! Remember who pays Krzywicki? HmMMM!!

Most of the arsenic levels from the latest testing were below the non-resident direct contact limit of 61 mg/kg, and most arsenic levels were between 15-25 mg/kg, Krzywicki said. Another chemistry expert emerged!

The highest reading was 50.6 mg/kg around a detention basin along Maffett Street. The state Department of Environmental Protection is requiring an additional 6 inches of topsoil there and the placement of

a visual barrier in the soil to indicate if soil erosion actually takes place, Krzywicki said.

Sounds a lot like *he said; she said*, without a jury. It is! There is no maintenance, architectural, or engineering expertise working for the School District. So, how would the public learn of any problems? Nobody who has the WBA public's interests at the top of their minds. Is working on the problem for the people.

Dear Reader, ask yourself if Roslyn is as nasty a story as WBASB. Why would this corrupt board—and we say corrupt because there is no other plausible way to look at it—why did they all go against sound reasoning to forge ahead with their dastardly plan to make kids sick in Plains Township despite hearing many, many objections.

The board chose a building site for a new high school that is a former coal mining site used as a coal ash dump and industrial waste dump. The site is subsidence prone, with levels of arsenic cancer-causing chemicals. In the last election, hoping to eliminate the board that did this, international non-fiction writer Brian W. Kelly published a book, called “The Big Toxic School.” In this book, Kelly brought to the forefront this sordid “Tale of Corruption, Deception, Taxation, & Tyranny.” The citizens almost unseated the Board in the last election. Next year for sure!

Wilkes-Barre School Board has been accustomed for many years to having its way. When nepotism did not work, cronyism was used. When cronyism failed, they used favoritism. The public saw so much corruption over the years from this board and its fore boards, that there had to be some great board payoffs that were kept a secret until enough board members did their individual time in the Big House.

To be specific over time, the school district had four board members indicted by the FBI and jailed for fraud. The corruption was so prevalent that three of the members were WBASB board presidents at the time of their removals. Some think they pocketed the most based on their titles. The most recent board president faced a life sentence for extortion, having forged the signatures of judges to gain favors for incarcerated inmates in the Luzerne County prison.

He carried an illegal weapon, and he used and distributed drugs to the inmates. Then there are other board members who had their problems, though less than being sentenced to jail, they were noteworthy none the less.

One member, who was not indicted, was embarrassed by a DUI, though seemingly not too embarrassed. He was a regular on Facebook etc. posting on social media joking about another teacher having oral sex with a student. Funny right? He is still on the board after retiring from a career as a WBA administrator. WBASD just can't get rid of these guys.

The other 8 board members are not as open about their issues because all eight of them at the time, as well as the hired Superintendent asked for this board member's resignation but he refused to step down. For their own reasons, they decided not to force the issue. You can get away with anything by being on this board.

Instead, he stayed on the board and is still on the board. The book that was written about the board's action titled *The Big Toxic School* is well known across the country for its subtitle: **Wilkes-Barre Area's Tale of Corruption, Deception, Taxation & Tyranny**. Pick the non-compliment from the sub-title that best fits the recalcitrant board member and it describes the public perception of them all pretty well. They are not very respected.

The Wilkes-Barre School Board made lots of mistakes and continues to make them because no higher authority has yet to remove their authority. The chain of costly errors and omissions, nepotism, cronyism, potential fraud, coupled with building a high school on an unlined coal ash dump rivals the travails of the Erin Brockovich tale.

It would be easy to add a little sex to the story of the district's activities, students, no central office, and a Superintendent, who may have gotten his position from nepotism with a perfect touch of cronyism and favoritism, and a no experience necessary requirement for the job.

## **Can it be Absurd?**

Some suggest that absurdity is the quality or state of being ridiculous or wildly unreasonable. The Wilkes-Barre Area School Board has been behaving in an absurd manner for many years, especially in recent years. Sometimes they go to jail. Sometimes they just pull bone head acts and stay in their positions to show the people who is really the boss.

Building on a toxic site to spite a major city in the district is clearly absurd. Nonetheless, the state environmental authority, DEP, who also may suffer a bit of nepotism, cronyism, and favoritism, has given approval to build a school on a poisonous site and it then must apparently monitor and assure the safety of the new high school project. Sure! The truth, however, is that before they audited, they already knew that the toxic ingredients that compose this site make it impossible to build and for it to be safe.

An intensive and honest site evaluation by the DEP was supposedly completed and an additional third party review was done by Tetra Tech. The site engineers, the district construction manager, the high-paid solicitor, the top pay receiving superintendent and the work-for free board have consistently answered reporters and citizens questions posed at board meetings regarding concerns about the site.

The reports are not a secret. All are available on the district website. Regardless of all the rhetoric, citizens do not feel too good about their kids breathing toxic air and parents do not feel good about paying the huge hundred plus-million dollar tab. It is all part of the toxic site scenario. Was the entire City of Wilkes-Barre and surrounds duped by a neighborhood board with an agenda and “big wheel connections?”

Board members have a tough time explaining to voters how this school will save money in the long run. Each election brings in less of the culpable board as they are partially reelected as the community wakes up to the deceit. There is always something missing with this board. For example, reports show there was supposedly a reduction of approximately \$3.5 million in operating costs that was supposed to offset the cost of construction. Nobody can verify if this was smoke or reality. Has it really happened? Will it really happen?

Many regular people living in the community understandably fear taxes will climb constantly, year after year, to pay for this monstrous expensive Taj-Mahal-like school consolidation. For example, right now, among other things, the local papers reported that the Wilkes-Barre Area School District is 33 million dollars underfunded by the state. This is according to the State's Basic Education Formula. How does the board make up this difference without whacking the people? Do they even care?

Taxes have climbed because of state mandated expenditures such as Charter Schools, Special Education and pensions that continually increase. The board says the selection of a consolidated school is a cost control method that will allow the district to save money. Nobody can refute the all-omnipotent board.

Most residents are not buying that. There is no proof for that even though the board expounds that it will keep taxes under control but SOS projects that taxes will grow out of control to as high as a half-billion dollars. The people do not believe the board. The juristocracy is for the officials and against the plebeians. ,

It is absurd that the school district is underfunded by \$33 million from the state and nobody is complaining at a healing level. At the same time, with a lack of finding, the area's population is at a poverty level. Wilkes-Barre Area treasures every new dollar it finds and it finds very few. The average wage is the lowest in the state. Yet, this board is ready to sock it to the people of the Wilkes-Barre Area for its own gains.

So, for the school consolidation's supposed savings, the board thinks the solution is too close the three existing high schools in the major tax base in the area—Wilkes-Barre City. Theoretically this is to save the taxpayer's money. People in the know understand that consolidation is an outdated costly means of saving money and it ain't going to happen even with this project plan.

Using inflated renovation costs and ignoring a potential forever shelf life on renovated, old well-built granite and marble buildings, the board selected the district owned Coughlin site. Despite historic

significance, the Board expressed a deep desire to demolish this historic school. At the same time, it chose in iteration 1, to build a new consolidated school by South Washington Street tracks, but Wilkes-Barre City would not permit it with its long standing zoning laws.

It was absurd that \$6 million was squandered on an idea with no permit authorizing the expenditure. The zoning request failed but first the district spent \$6 million. Who got the \$6 million? It clearly was not the citizens.

*Bad Education* would have found the cash lining , not having originally been willing to wait for the zoning decision. The WBASB board impatiently felt that it faced aging facilities that needed a lot of immediate work and believed trying to expand Coughlin was the expeditious way and they believed it would have no problem being approved by the City. The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley.

However, the downtown site which preceded the Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl, was as the pundits would say, *absurd*. It was actually asinine. The Super and the board officials knew the site did not meet the minimum space requirement required by the state for a high school (which the WBASB officials and legal staff should have known).

Six million dollars was put in Michael Jackson's Netherland and thus the Board wasted public funds put forth by a trusting impoverished school district. It was not a caring set of board members for sure or they would not have blown the taxpayers' money on nothing at all—not something to gain them benefit.

What absurd notion duped them? Despite the almost certainty of failure without a permit, the board agreed to lease a 90-year-old building for 20 years. Absurd! Yes!

In this scheme, the board's team also decided to destroy another City school, a monument to great building projects in the 1920's and 1930's—Meyers High School—bragging that the soil conditions were not right on the site with the big stadium and noting that it would have no option but to demolish the school and the entire site.



What kind souls? Ironically that all the years before this declaration and all the years after, the board kept Meyers in its stable of schools without a peep of this doomsday ultimate potentiality. What prompted the destroy and rebuild mentality?

Moreover, this was also despite a building already on the Meyers site--Kistler Elementary across from the stadium in Miner Park. It had already been deemed ok enough to add a WBASB board-approved building addition of \$27 million to the same building – an elementary school. How can this be. It is absurd. It's the only excuse. Is absurdity, corruption, or is it incompetence or is it both?

I married a GAR Girl. Being a Meyers guy, she had to be pretty. She was very pretty. I know that Grenadiers love their school no matter how old they get. GAR High School was put back into its best shape in many years after its recent remodeling. When the board chose to save Meyers and grow Coughlin, they found no place for GAR and at first, they did not even consider GAR in their considerations.

So, they began to think of district configurations with middle schools. Since they had no place preordained in their big plans for GAR High School, even though middle school had been ruled out by the same board in an earlier consideration, GAR now seemed to fit the bill. That my friends is absurd and it is the product of no planning.

The best part of this seriously flawed, potentially illegal plan was the renovation, not the expansion of, a previously shuttered elementary school--Mackin School sized for 500 students. For its own reasons, the board had completely remodeled Mackin even though it had not been in use for years. Perhaps one of their construction buddies needed a job. Who knows for sure. The big shame is that nobody trusts the board's decisions. The board earned the public's mistrust. It did not just *happen*.

Not thinking straight again, the board decided to place 800 high school students from a prematurely closed Coughlin High School into the formerly shuttered Mackin school temporarily until the Board got its musical buildings straightened out. Mackin was built for 500 little kids not full grown high school students.

The cost was not insignificant at \$9 million but it was just poor people paying for the renovations so nobody of consequence would complain. The not-approved Coughlin consolidation was to replace the former Coughlin and Meyers schools. Then, CHS closed but the CHS students were not moved to Meyers, which had lots of space. They were moved to the formerly shuttered Mackin Elementary and then it seemed like the board had really considered this move. But, in retrospect, it too is absurd.

It was physically possible with a few moderations costing a tremendous lot less than \$9 million that another option including Meyers in the mix could have been effected. GAR had not been explicitly highlighted for change.

This plan had to incorporate the segregation of 800 GAR students, as a substantial proportion of the school population were minorities. Segregation is no longer legal. They had never been considered in the “beneficial” consolidation but they did have the highest percentage of minorities. This board action led to a news story stating that racism is alive and well, by the executive director of NAACP. Is this information absurd enough? Because it is still not the worst.

When the City refused to give the board a zoning permit to build in Wilkes-Barre City, the board decided to punish Wilkes-Barre City for not doing the board’s wishes. With a young like a kid, boyish, novice Superintendent, the board should have expected childish antics from the new boss because they got them in spades.

When rebuffed by the City of Wilkes-Barre’s Zoning Dept., the board angrily packed up its flip charts and power points from its presentation on South Washington Street and they went looking for another place. To find a place for their world class ignominy, this board was ready to shut down the Empire State Building if it had to, to get its will done.

After wounding the *Super* and the board, the three Wilkes-Barre schools had no chance of surviving in Wilkes-Barre proper as part of the WBASD. They still don’t unless this book works. Meanwhile the board unleashed its venom on the City while looking anywhere else but Wilkes-Barre for a new site. One looking at the spiteful reaction

of the baby-faced Superintendent for not getting his way, one might conclude that if he had to build a school underwater in which all the kids would drown on the first day, that would be OK with him—as long as it were not in Wilkes-Barre.

But, he might be convicted of murder for that so the plan of building a new consolidated toxic school outside of Wilkes-Barre City looked like it would serve the Superintendent and the board in such a way as to permit them to live after the project was completed.

This very young and not necessarily very wise board superintendent was over-heard after a recent Board meeting saying “Now, it’s any place for the new school but Wilkes-Barre.” Wilkes-Barre City had to be taught by the WBASB that it is not nice to fool with a young, inexperienced, vindictive, incompetent, corrupt superintendent. Can anything be more absurd?

What if I told you that only 7 sites were considered out of 117 square miles of pristine land. Only three non-district sites, two of which were coal mining family owned, Biscontini and Pagnotti, were part of the mix of possibilities. We have not examined if the family coal barons had any connections with the decisions made to favor them. But, surely it is possible. Anything is possible when the whiff of corruption is in the air

Of interest besides Plains was a Wilkes-Barre City site called the Murray Complex in downtown Wilkes-Barre. It is just a mile from Holy Redeemer High School. And, so it had already been zoned OK for high schools. But, the intemperate Superintendent had nixed Wilkes-Barre and was looking out of the boundaries of the major district municipality.

Despite it having passed its own zoning test for school construction not too, too long ago, when Holy Redeemer HS was built, the Board decided not to test this great site with another zoning hearing and the risk of raising the kid Superintendent’s ire. Instead, the primary game plan was that Wilkes-Barre City had to be punished.

This Murray Complex therefore was rejected by the wise men on the Board and the young superintendent, supposedly for the safety of the

children. They said that it was adjacent to a busy city street and near railroad tracks. This was a bogus reason as the same street bordered Holy Redeemer High. City residents knew from widespread hearsay that the board pulled out of Wilkes-Barre to punish the City for not permitting the school to be built in a cramped area on South Washington street, by not granting the building permit.

So, in the final analysis, the board's chosen safest best site was the worst that could be found anyplace in the country. Perhaps the real Chernobyl might be a worst site—maybe. But just perhaps. And it is not in the U.S. Just like the Catholic High School, called Redeemer, it would be adjacent to everything bad—the superhighway Cross-Valley expressway, near railroad tracks, a strip and deep mined coal ash dump, with cancer causing arsenic, and prone to subsidence.

After wasting six million dollars on the no-go at Coughlin consolidation, the board was seemingly desperate to find a quick deal. They agreed to pay five times the lowest assessed value for a former industrial waste dump site. Forget about intelligence tests, does the state require competency tests for board members and superintendents in Pennsylvania?

The Board tried to justify it by a \$3.2 million-dollar bogus and corrupt mineral rights purchase to show its legitimacy was never appraised. Did somebody in the know or one of the owners make a killing on this undocumented transaction? If I asked to show me the money? What would I find? Why else would they make such an obviously poor decision.

The board action authorized the purchase at or higher than the properties assessed value. How did they justify that? The board purchased the property for \$4.2 million with appraisals in hand from \$250,000 to a high of \$800,000. Is this paragraph absurd enough? It continues. The board spent millions when it did not have to do so. Why? Who profited?

One would think that all efforts for a school board that produces poor academic achievement as its main product would make all its decisions to better student outcomes. Not this school board? Why not? What motivated this board to go against the wishes of a community to serve its own ends? Was there a pot at the end of the

rainbow? There sure are a lot of great salaries and stipends even if no pot.

Maybe they did not care about what their principal job as board members actually is. Everybody knows that the academic achievement results from this board's leadership is lots closer to last in the state than first. No expenditure that does nothing for academic achievement should ever have been made in the Wilkes-Barre Area. The Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl is undoubtably the least prudent of all the Board's decisions in which students have been involved. .

To repeat, the #1 problem in the WBASD is student achievement. It is nonexistent. It ranks near the bottom of all school districts statewide. National education research and the opinions and results of neighboring districts show that consolidation would definitely make it worse. So, did the School Board decide to consolidate even though they knew it would not be good for the students or the taxpayers. They sure did!

National educational research and our own local studies state that closing the neighborhood schools is a major disadvantage academically. Neighborhood schools enhance the education process. Despite the evidence, the WBASB decided to close all three neighborhood high schools in Wilkes-Barre City, the major community in the district. Research and our own studies list middle schools as a disadvantage. So the board decided as an intermediate decision to have two middle schools.

Experts know that community (neighborhood) schools link students, families, and communities to educate children and strengthen neighborhoods. They have become a popular model for education in many US cities in part because they build on community assets and address multiple determinants of educational disadvantage. Big schools, especially big toxic consolidated schools are outmoded and do not produce such positive outcomes.

Since community schools seek to have an impact on populations, not just the children enrolled, they provide an opportunity to improve community health. Stripping the largest community in a school

district (Wilkes-Barre) of all of its community schools decreases that community's chance at achieving excellent academic results, though sports results may fare better.

Community schools influence the health and education of neighborhood residents through three pathways: building trust, establishing norms, and linking people to networks and services. Through such services as school-based health centers, nutrition education, family mental health counseling, violence prevention, and sexuality education, these schools build on the multiple reciprocal relationships between health and education.

By developing closer ties between community schools and neighborhood health programs, public health professionals can help to mobilize a powerful new resource for reducing the health and educational inequalities that now characterize US cities. We suggest an agenda for research, practice, and policy that can build the evidence needed to guide such a strategy. Risking student health by forcing students to attend large schools built on toxic mine chemical disposal sites clearly does not assist in maintaining positive health results.

Problem # 2, underfunded \$33 million a year in a poverty level district. We enter a potential half BILLION-dollar project with no long-range curriculum/facility master plan for only 2400 students leaving 4500 in the balance, for three facilities to one leaving 6 other aged facilities out: estimated renovation costs \$67 million. Problem #3 Facilities. Covered in paragraph one.

Problem # 4. Due to the dire straits of student achievement, financial woes, and facilities, required qualified, credible experience at the district and board levels, including contracted professional services. A solicitor who said zoning can't fail; kids need to eat coal ash to be harmed; the deeds convey mineral rights but they didn't; the site is worth \$4.2 million based on un-assessed mineral rights.

Three (restorable) historic schools in the balance, not one but four architect firms hired with zero large school restoration experience, and sparse large school construction experience. Plus, no in-house engineering or architectural expertise and no plans to hire a

competent maintenance crew or develop a maintenance plan even for the new building.

Provided with the opportunity to hire the two top district positions, the board hires a superintendent and business manager that never held the positions prior. At the board level, at a time when experience was mandated, a former district clerk is made board president, over four master's degree holders.

Credibility? Four former board members jailed for pay to play activities. A board president faced a life sentence for among a large list of chargers, extortion. Need we add substance abuse, moral issues, and racism, board role models? Has this document met, if not exceeded the definition of absurd?

Held in high esteem (years back) were community volunteers (unpaid) that carried the revered title, Board of Education Director. Only exceeded by Board President. Major corporations and banks encouraged their employees to run for school boards. Five years back community leaders, Save Our Schools Inc. attempted to recruit people to run for the school board; not successful. Although we did get a retired grandmother to run and she is on the board. Adding two more this last election. We attempted to get a bank executive to run, he was told the bank was concerned. Two realtors were interested but felt it would be negative on their business. The exact opposite to, back in 1968 WBASD was nationally acclaimed for academic achievements.

Why the reluctance to serve? Four board members conducting a pay to play scheme with district positions from custodians, teachers, administrators, and venders, went to jail. An FBI indicted board member a month later was elected board president. A second board president, bring the total to five WBA board members, faced a life sentence for among many charges, extortion and forged signatures of sitting judges. A recent board member while the board was in session gawked at his cell phone which had a half-naked woman on the screen.

The W-B police frequented his home for alleged drug distribution and potential brothel activity. A sitting board member (retired WBA

administrator) arrested for a DUI, was labeled by police and hospital security as belligerent, and felt that as a board member he should not have been arrested. Same board member, frequent social media poster posted that an AZ teacher having oral sex with a student as humorous and posted concern that she might have broken teeth.

In another post of a picture of ethnic link sausage, he described as turds. Another posting bordered on homophobic, posting fag. Latest was his opinion on not allowing the confederate flag. One hundred and ninety-two replies, including a fellow board member stating as a board member he should not have taken the stand publicly. For the first time in the hundred-year history 8 members and the superintendent requested a fellow board member's resignation. Still, it did not happen.

Then we have a retired WBA attendance clerk whose computer put out over 10 raciest e-mails that put disadvantaged students down. Her reply, someone used my computer when I was on coffee breaks. Her social media posts clearly indicate missing filters, I don't give a crap, or supporting a posting that put down Mexicans and Methodists. And a very insensitive posting, a reply to a citizen providing her reasonable input. These postings and others put validity to the possibility that she did execute the racist and derogatory e-mails

The situation in Wilkes-Barre Area School District not only seems absurd when you read about it, it is even more absurd when you live through it and watch this board in action. Wilkes-Barre Area can do much better if we choose.



# Chapter 15 Various Board Meeting Communications



In this chapter we discuss some communication your authors had recently with the board. With COVID-19, there are no more in-person board meetings but the public is permitted to send in notes that are to be read at the e-meetings. Both of your authors took advantage of this at the October “meeting” and several other meetings prior. This chapter demonstrates that the people have not forgotten what is happening regarding the construction of the Taj Mahal Big Toxic School on Little Chernobyl. Let’s begin with Dr. Richard Holodick’s latest submission to the board:

## Dr. Holodick’s October Board Meeting Submission

Continues to the five asterisks below

Let us begin by establishing that the average salary [of the citizens] in the district is at the poverty level. There is a high percentage of seniors living on fixed incomes struggling to pay taxes and medications. The district is grossly under-funded by \$33 million a year.

There are a growing number of foreclosures in the district contributing to neighborhood blight. This, of course lowers property

values for all residents. No doubt this has been a contributing factor to the board overspending its budget three consecutive years, one-year nearly \$10 million; a violation of Pa, State School Code 609.

The board faced a potential financial tsunami promoting the need for careful budget monitoring and responsible spending. The 2016 audit predicted a \$70 million deficit in four years and warned that the lack of complete and timely treasures reports limits the board's ability to make informed financial decisions. This is a troublesome statement considering the half billion-dollar price tag facing this district.

I do give this board credit in working with the administration to improve the district's financial picture. I state without reservations that this board has made costly decisions without the adequate data to support the decisions. For example, the Pagnotti land purchase was the poster child example. Prior to even an estimate of the site prep costs, the PennDot requirement for major road revisions and signals was ignored. The board agreed to buy the property at the certified assessed value. No discussion.

My apology for beating a dead horse about the \$ six million spent and lost by not waiting for zoning approvals. But, as a taxpayer, and a watchdog, I will keep beating the horse until (1) I see someone held accountable and (2) when irresponsible behavior stops. When there is no accountability, bad behavior gets repeated. And, it did. Not waiting seems to be the problem as school design and site work at taxpayer expense began on the Pagnotti property prior to closing on the property. This was unauthorized and illegal.

Our great country is brought to its knees by the toxic COVID-19 virus pandemic. We are compelled to wear face coverings and stay safe by staying away from toxic environments. Yet, somehow, we rush to build a school on top of a toxic environment. Our schools are still functioning under very restricted conditions.

What does our 21/22 school year afford our high school children? Many will spend two hours a day on a school bus, considered a toxic enclosure, to attend a new school built on a site where toxic materials can cause cancer and other health related conditions. Hopefully COVID-19 will be solved; and hopefully the site will be 100% capped and stay capped, and there will be no worries. But, all the wishing and

hoping in the world cannot arrest this nasty virus and the predicament that building on toxic land brings to the people.

No other state would permit this. Why does Pennsylvania? Five other states are on record saying they won't gamble the safety of their children. Twenty-nine other states have very strict safety requirements out of concern for the safety of their children. The sad part is this board had so many other options available, it did not have to create a problem where there was none. The WBASB did not do its due diligence to searching out options including existing district resources.

Back to the underfunded poverty level school district. The board does not know how to make prudent decisions. For example, it is not staffed properly by design. For this building project, it recognized that it did not have the right people on board. It would have been nice to have an architect on staff. To solve the deficiency, the board hired four firms. Why? That question is unanswered but they firms did not work for free.

The state recommended a site size of 35 pristine acres. The board overcommits the district and it buys 78 toxic acres. The board perceives the need for a new football stadium. Yet, the District owns a stadium used by many football teams as their home field. So, we have a stadium. The same goes for a new swimming pool. Yet, we have a swimming pool. Practice fields are moved at \$86,000; yet we have enough practice fields. Eight coaches' offices are deemed necessary for part time coaches? The board then spends \$3 million on Coughlin high school repair work and shortly after sells it for under \$2 million?

There are not enough pages nor is there enough time in the day to outline every faux pas as a proper pseudonym for this group of procrastinators. But here are a few more. The board authorized the design and site work prior to zoning approvals; the board authorizes the design and site work on a site not owned; the board consolidates sports to represent a consolidated high school that does not exist. The number of et cetera's following this sentence are not related to the number of dilly daddle mistakes by the board, etc. etc. etc....

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Thank you Dr. Holodick

Your other author, Brian Kelly also submitted to the board at the October meeting. Here is his submission:

Thanks you for reading this at tonight's meeting

Dr. Holodick is a prized asset in the Wilkes-Barre Area. Thank you Dr. Holodick for keeping the Board as honest as possible.

I must admit that I find it quite interesting that Dr. Holodick, following a national search by a former US Assistant Secretary of Education was employed as an assistant superintendent in a 42,000, 5,000 employee metro school district. Following a national search, City Colleges of Chicago, seven community colleges, 77,000 students a year, one of the largest community college systems in the nation, hired him as their Director of Planning for a \$60 million-dollar high technology center. On top of that, add another 20 years consulting for an international planning firm.

With many more credentials than any other applicant, he applied for a seat on the WBA board but did not gain the position because a myopic board in a closed session chose to hire a basketball coach instead. This coach, to my knowledge never attended a Wilkes Barre board meeting and his belief in public education is in question as his children are in a private school. No cronyism there.

I believe the board has four basketball coaches, explaining the obvious sports proclivity over academics in this district. It was Dr. Holodicks keen mind and his 50 years' experience and incredible knowledge that I choose him to collaborate with me in this publishing effort. Would it not be nice if he were available to work on behalf of the WBASD to assure we could have been spared by the legions of miscues this board has brought upon us. I have never written a book with a co-author before. Watch for it! It will be out soon.

Good evening again, Dr. Holodick and I would like to thank this and all former boards for providing enough material to write my 254th

and 255th non-fiction books. He and I are collaborating on this most important concern, book one corruption, Kelly, followed by public school governance Holodick,. Both volumes are written as they apply to Luzerne County, statewide if not nationally.

There is a problem and not just in our district or county with policy, procedures, qualifications to be on a school board. Moreover, there are hidden agendas, nepotism, cronyism and yes fraud. All these distractions have a debilitating effect on education, and of course excessive property taxes.

Thank You members of this board and school officials and newspapers. Without your publicized board meetings, minutes, newspaper articles, meetings with state and other officials, zoning hearings it would have been impossible to collect as much evidence as we must prove that the stake holders of public schools have not been served well by boards of education under the present system.

I must give special thanks to the passionate e-mail writers, and forever Face Book trash submitters for their written contributions. There are still a few weeks for those who would like to be heard. The first part of this book will be available for publication in just a few weeks. Any citizen, board member or administrator wishing to submit additional items relating to property taxes, corruption, or governance feel free to contact Dr. Holodick, and we will try to add your material to the evidence that there may be a need to change how public-school districts are governed.

Brian W. Kelly  
Wilkes Barre

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This completes the Brian Kelly Board submission.

This is still Brian, however. I am writing about the board submission that I compiled before I realized that this was too long. And I trimmed it back to what you see above.

Before I sent the above email to the board, I had penned some more generous and shall we say more germane thoughts on the Big Toxic School. I compared the situation to the Roslyn School in Bad Education. Dr. Holodick and I agreed that it was too long to read at the e-meeting, but it is not too long for this book. Dr. Holodick asked me to include it below.

Here it is. You will note some similarities with the actual submission.

Good evening, Dr. Holodick and I would like to thank this and former boards for providing enough material to write my 254th book. He and I are collaborating on this most important topic/concern, local, statewide if not nationally. I am talking about the governance of public schools. Policy, procedures, qualifications to be on the board, hidden agendas, nepotism, cronyism, fraud, racism, moral and well as morale issues.

Thank You members of the board and school officials. Without your publicized board meetings, minutes, newspaper articles, meetings with state and other officials, zoning hearings etc., it would have been impossible to collect as much evidence as we have to prove that the people of WBASD have not been served well by this board.

Additionally, I must give special thanks to the passionate e-mail writers, and forever Face Book trash submitters for their well-written contributions. There is still a few weeks for those who would like to be heard. The first part of this book will be available for publication in just a few weeks. Any board member or administrator wishing to submit additional items of interest that we may have missed, feel free to contact Dr. Holodick, and we will try to add your material to the "evidence." If you have a refutation of potentially damning material, this too is requested.

As you may know, there are 10,758 public school districts in the United States, making up 18,841 high schools, 23,783 middle schools, and 50,486 elementary schools. This means that there is plenty of information available to make sure a school district such as WBASD does not have to reinvent the policy wheel for every decision.

The board should have known for example that building on a too-small tract of land on Washington St. would not pass zoning. Did they ask anybody before investing taxpayer dollars in a moot project?

Moreover, even without the efforts of thousands of US School districts guiding us by their successes, we in WBASD could have known that building a school for children and young adults on top of a contaminated toxic mine dump was not the best thinking on the subject. So, despite all the great examples, WBASD decided to use its own ingenuity to get us into this mess. Now, how do they get us out of it?

You may also know that the school-ranking website Niche evaluates school districts. It bases its rankings on several factors, among them academics, teachers, health and safety, and diversity. They seem to be different criteria than those used by this board: policies, procedures, qualifications to be on the board, hidden agendas, nepotism, cronyism, fraud, racism, moral and well as morale issues.

In a recent round of evaluations, the Jericho Union Fress School District in Jericho, New York, topped the list, making it the best school district in America. Perhaps the WBA board visited Jericho when searching for solutions. But, then again, based on what we have collected in our research, perhaps not.

With WBASD ranked about 444th of 500 in the state, we are not the worst, But, unlike Jericho Union, we are far from the best. Perhaps we got our signals from the Roslyn School District in Roslyn, New York, which in terms of notoriety would be the best known school district in the country but probably the worst in terms of governance.

You may know that Hugh Jackman plays Frank Tassone, a successful, charismatic superintendent of Roslyn, who goes on to steal \$11.2 million from the school budget with his associate Pamela Gluckin (played by Oscar winner Allison Janney). Thus is listed as the largest public school embezzlement in U.S. history. Looking at the antics and finances of WBASD, what do the people of WBA think a real audit would find?

A side note on these two NY school districts is that Roslyn learned nothing from Jericho despite being so close -- just 5.84 miles. Folks, you can lead a horse to water and even put water in a horse's stall but you can't make a horse drink--no way and no how. So too when the font of knowledge is so close. Those that dig in do it their own way and lose. There are just 5.84 miles separating Roslyn from Jericho in an east direction and 8 miles (12.87 kilometers) by car, following the South Service Road route. Roslyn and Jericho are 10 minutes far apart, if you drive non-stop. The WBA board can visit both before the re-audit. It can be a one day trip. Maybe the Board has already visited Jericho. OK, we covered that.

By the way, I had the pleasure of reading Dr. Holodick's submission before I made my own. With his strong background and keen mind, we are blessed to have him as a source of guidance for the school district. I sure wish his sage counsel was used more often. Just look at the facts that in a few paragraphs above that outlined for us. The debacle of the Big Toxic High School has not gone away and it will live until somebody chooses to make it better. We do not think the board will ever reverse its decision so we ask outside officials to do this for us, and please do not hold the people accountable for the great monetary loss the bad management of this WBASD has cost us all.

When you look at the Holodick submittal, ask yourself how anybody can look at the facts that he again places before us and ignore them. Yet, we do. These are not rogue rantings of somebody who wants to keep this situation in turmoil. What is it then? Why is Dr. Holodick and others so persistent in blaming the board for the Big Toxic High School rather than accepting it.

What Holodick offers is a lesson in the truth? I have often wondered as a Meyers High graduate of 1965 of all the anomalies in the building of The Big Toxic School that any caring citizen of Wilkes-Barre and surrounds could have given up their rights as a citizen to what some would say from the evidence, is a corrupt board of governance. Not me!

Looking at the evidence it appears that the board and the superintendent and the solicitors and others with a stake in the deal did not seem to care one iota about why it was elected. People of



WBA, do you approve of the shenanigans of this board?. Do you think it is OK to build a school for your kids on a toxic mine dump?

My kids went to Meyers, thankfully, years ago. My kids are out of school but many in WBA have put their children at risk by agreeing to send them to this poor excuse for a school built on top of a toxic mine dump. It is never too late to save your children. You may regret not taking action someday. Why take the risk? People of WBA, if you don't like what is happening, then why are you so quiet when Dr. Holodick speaks exactly what you think? I like it here in WBA but in a lot of ways, I am ashamed to live here. Yes, I am and you quiet ones, you should be most ashamed. Let your kids suffer? Maintain your silence! Until what? Speak up! Your voice matters!

Thank you

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The above statement was not submitted to the board but the board can learn a few things by reading it. Don't you think?

## **Prior Board Comments**

Early in 2020 About the Pagnotti Site

"wbasdpubliccommentsd@wbasd.k12.pa.us" <

From Dr. Holodick & Brian Kelly

From the January 8, 2018 board minutes Ms. Thomas moved, seconded by Mr. Evans, to select the 80+/- Pagnotti site in Plains Pennsylvania as the best location for the districts new High School and to authorize Alan Rosen and Olen Smith to update appraisal reports for the property. Most important in the motion under New Business, was authorize the superintendent, business manager, and solicitor to engage in negotiations with the property owner for acquisition of the site at the appraised values.

If I read this correctly, they were authorized to negotiate, not actually buy, to acquire at the appraised values. The appraised values published went from a low of \$250,000 to a high of \$800,000. It has

been stated that Pagnotti received \$4.2 million, with \$3.2 million for the mineral rights. Problem, that leaves \$1 million paid for the land appraised at a high of \$800,000, in violation of the board action to pay up to the appraised value. Problem two, there was never a certified appraisal of the mineral rights identified publicly. A search of the board minutes does not reveal a motion to buy at \$4.2 million, supported by an appraisal at that amount.

It is important to establish if in fact the property was legally purchased and the date. It appears that the district authorized work in excess of one million dollars prior to owning the property, thereby paying tax dollars to do work not owned by the district.

Last question: state law requires mining site be reclaimed with five years of vegetation to be legally sold. Prior to the purchase this 78 acres looked like a gray moon shot with no visible vegetation. In the not too distant past, it appeared that the district was doing reclamation work and paying monthly to do what appeared to be reclaiming the land.

The following is the actual Jan. 8,2018 motion.

#### Summary of Minutes Regular Board Meeting January 8, 2018

#### Unfinished Business

Ms. Thomas moved, seconded by Mr. Evans, to select the 80-Acre +/- Pagnotti site in Plains Pennsylvania as the best location for the District's needs for the new High School and to authorize Alan Rosen and Olen Smith to update appraisal reports for the property. I further move that the Superintendent, Business Manager and Solicitor be authorized to extend an offer to acquire the property at the appraised values and to engage in negotiations with the Property Owner for acquisition of the site. The vote was as follows:

8 Ayes: Evans, Galella, Geiger, Quinn, Susck, Thomas, Walker, Gaffrey 1 Nay: Patia

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**Comment about the Board violating state's recommendations submitted by Brian Kelly August 2020**

I would like to begin by acknowledging the difficult challenge you face in providing education and transportation for 7000 students under the rules of this pandemic.

After completing my 202nd non-fiction book *The Big Toxic School*, in August 2019, and now rapping up my 243rd, about this school district--addressing school governance, my research has uncovered a disturbing pattern of avoidance.

It is evident that this board majority has ignored scholarly research , which includes parts of the Board's (WBASB) own half-million-dollar facility study, as well as recommendations by the task force committees that the Board voted-in to provide recommendations.

Let's begin with the states recommendation of 35 acres for a consolidated school. I am sure you are aware this is a minimum number for the acreage upon which to build a school. In the Washington St. Zoning proposal, the site was just 2.7 acres. Let's also examine the federal discrimination laws relating to discrimination. You may recall that the WBASB excluded the high school with the most minority students from the students. This had been driven home by the superintendent under oath stating GAR will not be a part of the new school. Then, there was the costliest mistake at \$6 million. It was blatantly and irresponsibly caused by impatience. Your team could not or would not wait for zoning approvals before you spend money on a project that might not be approved.

I am sure that the Board is aware that five other states forbid building a public school near a contaminated site. Yet, you went 100% on the Plains Twp site in which you opted to build on top of not only a contaminated site but you also ignored the states acknowledging the sites long history of subsidence episodes. It is a puzzlement as to why anybody would do this. Nonetheless, you went ahead despite warnings. One such warning came from somebody the Board knows well. You ignored the advice of a former district graduate who is presently a General Hospital surgeon. Dr. Mark Schiowitz volunteered for 10 years in the WBASD sports program and he also served on the WBASB. He declared that from his evaluation, this Plains Twp. location is the worst site to put children near. Actually

building a school on top of it makes it even more of a careless venture.

Besides Dr. Schiowitz, there is also Dr Richard Holodick and the Save Our Schools group of professionals, district grads and parents who have written much about the folly of a plan to create a Big Toxic School. Added to these negatives, there is the fact that there were three separate assessments that were provided by certified licensed appraisal firms that placed the value at \$10,000 an acre. The Board agreed to a \$50,000 an acre number, based on non-assessed mineral rights. Yet, the Board's Solicitor said in writing that he felt the land was worth \$50,000 an acre without even considering the mineral rights. These are not the only examples.

There are as you know other examples of the Board's making poor decisions while completely ignoring opposing views. Don't you think it is amusing, though not funny that the state requires community input for such major projects but unfortunately, the state apparently does not require that the board adhere to the input received or to even consider it.

As a final note. we have all seen the papers recently about Ned Evans recent issues. Don't you think that certain board members need to back off their horrendous racist and immoral face book posts on issues not related to the district and instead address those issues that do. Surely, the education of the children and their safety must come first. It is not only not too late but it is necessary that this Board come up with a serious change in attitude about listening to the community. Moreover, the Board should not go it alone in the future as it has in the past. It would help to consider the history of other districts experiences before making harmful and costly mistakes.

As you may be aware I am a published author, a resident of Wilkes Barre, and a graduate of Meyers high school. If I can help in any other way, please advise.

Thank you

Brian W. Kelly

Wilkes-Barre

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**Comment to board about the opinion of WB residents etc. regarding action on the Big Toxic School Also comment on professional services.**

Before I leave my comment for the Boards response, I would like to present the following informal positive acknowledgment of The Big Toxic School book by a Meyers High School graduate from the class of 1965. She was one of the brightest in our class. The WBASBs actions puzzle her along with many of us in the WBA. Here is the comment she recently wrote to me:

*Brian,*

*I just completed reading your book, The Big Toxic School for the second time. It is beyond me how this school board could endorse this new school.*

My comment for the board starts below and it ends with a simple question which is also very short.

You may know that Albert Einstein believed that those that keep doing what they always did will always get what they always got. The Wilkes Barre school district infamous for problematic decisions relating to hiring, contracting professional services, and accountability, has always done what they always did. It is always based on unsupported data and/or listening to some with hidden agendas. Considering that there is a superintendent, solicitor, construction management firm, at a taxpayer cost which I believe exceeds \$50,000 a month, I am puzzled on how the following naughty nine items slipped through the cracks.

All will be spelled out in a second book, a Brian W. Kelly, Dr. Richard Holodick collaboration. **The Governance of Public Schools.** Please note the following:

The board was advised:

- There was no need to include the school students with the most minorities in the new school.  
That placing a very big school on a postage sized lot, zoned commercial could not fail zoning.
- That spending \$9 million to renovate and not expand a 500-student school and attempt to squeeze in 800 students was a viable option for pre-maturely closing Coughlin high school prior to having a solid plan.
- That spending nearly \$3 million on architecturally significant, historic Coughlin high school and advertising it for sale at \$1.5 million is fiscally responsible.
- That demolishing architecturally significant, historic Meyers High School, costing \$15 million to be left with an empty lot worth a half million is fiscally responsible.
- That the selection of a deep mined, strip mined, unlined coal ash dump, former industrial waste dump, containing cancer causing materials, and prone to subsidence was the very best site out of 117 square miles.
- That it was acceptable for taxpayers to pay for reclaiming the land when the state law requires that the seller assume this burden.
- That spending a million plus on land not owned by the taxpayers is acceptable.
- That ignoring a board action requiring the purchase price be supported by land assessments, and paying \$50,000 an acre, for land assessed at \$10,000 an acre was saving the taxpayers money.

There is more, but point made. Paraphrasing Einstein's belief, if you always listen to those you always listened to, you always get what you always got. Are there any plans to hold people accountable?

Brian W. Kelly  
Wilkes-Barre

## Chapter 16 Nepotism at the Highest Level



### Addressing and Correcting WBASD Problems

The highest position that the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board hired in recent times is titled Superintendent of Schools. This is such a major position; it would have been appropriate for the Board to conduct what is called a nationwide formal search to assure the best person for the job were found and hired.

Thus this spawns the question: "Did the board conduct a formal search?" Since some effort seems to have been expended to give the board some level of credence even though it may have not been more than a half-baked attempt to cover the lack of an earnest search, we must ask the following question:

Should paying the Pa. School Boards Association \$10,000, not an official search agency, to conduct the search be properly categorized as a "formal search?" Other than the board, most officials would answer that question in the negative.



Colleges and Universities have made a science out of recruiting the best people. None of their principles were followed when the top position in the district was available.

The objective, whether for a college or a school district, is to follow best practices in recruiting and hiring faculty and staff to get the highest quality personnel while also assuring that we are successful in meeting our critical diversity challenge. In order to ensure the highest quality of candidates, it is a best practice to post all positions and actively recruit. Detailed position descriptions are required.

Unlike the hiring of the WBA Superintendent, the descriptions should not be customized to fit a specific individual to assure his being awarded the job. Candidate pools must include diverse candidates within the context of the unit (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender-identity, national origin, protected veteran status, disability, etc.). The positions must be made known to the broadest array of candidates possible and then it is up to the board to hire the best candidate from the pool. •



Here is what we found in the WBA board search. Seventeen applicants applied. About a dozen had experience in that they actually served as a superintendent in another district. Unfortunately, for WBA, Brian Costello, a youthful looking WBA official, was selected for the job. The unfortunate part is that Costello had zero years' experience as a principal or an assistant superintendent or as a superintendent.

He did have a total of 4 years as an assistant principal, and 4 years in central office as director of curriculum responsible for "student achievement." So, there were some measurable items upon which to evaluate the candidate. How did that work out? WBASD is now ranked #444 / 501 in the state of PA in academics—the purpose of schools. Seems like the academic achievement in the Costello years is not as good as one might expect for a board paying top dollar for its neophyte Superintendent.

Researching this issue, we were told by a board member that during the search one applicant stood out but that they could not afford the salary the person wanted. Looking at the District's recent academic achievement, perhaps the bigger truth it turns out is that the Board could not afford to not hire such a qualified applicant. The district is comfortably situated at the bottom of the barrel. What motivates a superintendent to help student's learn? It certainly is not the wearing of a construction headpiece and pretending to be an engineer.

### **What causes poor results?**

What is the primary cause of poor results in an organization such as a school district or a business enterprise? For example, a school district that is the lowest rank in academic achievement in the state. The answer is bad management.

Most notably, an analysis suggests that the curriculum does not align with the demographics of the students we serve. If the students are not learning what we teach, it is best to teach the way students learn. It is a known fact that all district sports are well equipped. Some might say that each sport has all the balls it needs. However, things are lacking in the classrooms in terms of basic teaching supplies and books. If there is a plan, it has created great sports results, but it has

not helped academic achievement. WBA unfortunately as noted is a lot closer to the bottom than the top.

Bad management is a plague on all organizations whether in the private or public sector. It has a high impact on employees' and an organization's overall operations. Incompetent managers are often hired because they ask for less money. Sometimes organizations promote from within. This is also a less expensive strategy but it does not necessarily yield the best results.

Poor Managers are challenged trying to motivate staff members to perform work in an excellent fashion. In addition, substandard supervisors may not be able to balance budgets, increase revenues or capably perform other crucial tasks. A tid-bit for the WBASB and all organizations is that if district employees complain about working for your management team, investigate the claims so your organization doesn't suffer irreparably from poor leadership.

Like most organizations or businesses that fail in their main role, the biggest problems with the Wilkes-Barre Area School District are also spawned from bad management. No greater sign that the problems are malignant and unsolvable is when an organization has an opportunity to change its leadership and better itself and instead, it chooses patronage or favoritism or cronyism or all three. Resorting to nepotism or cronyism makes big management problems eternally unsolvable. Think about it.

**Patronage** is defined as the control of or power to make appointments to government jobs or the power to grant other political favors.

**Favoritism, cronyism, and nepotism** are ways in which patronage is often distributed. Patronage itself has several meanings but in the hiring of personnel it has a simple definition. Patronage is the control of or power to make appointments to government jobs or the power to grant other political favors.

When Bernard Prevuznak announced for example, in February, 2016, that the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board had a plum position to offer the "right" person—the top position in the District—some have queried if it was competence or nepotism or patronage that

prompted the board to hire from within a person whose family was well known in political circles. Brian James Costello was awarded the position. How did it happen? Was he the best person in the country for the job? Has he performed as well as the top billing he received? Is bottom of the heap a good record for a superintendent with little experience? Considering the super's salary was not entry-level, many suggest that WBASD could have done lots better.

As favoritism is the broadest of these related terms, we'll start with its definition. Basically favoritism is just what it sounds like; it's favoring a person not because he or she is doing the best job but rather because of some extraneous feature such as membership in a favored group, personal likes and dislikes, etc.

Favoritism can be demonstrated in hiring, wage increases, as well as honoring, or awarding contracts. A related idea is patronage, giving public service jobs to those who may have helped elect the person who has the power of appointment. Often those who are hired from patronage, practice patronage when they have the power to hire. In such instances the problems in managing the organization are much more difficult to solve.

Favoritism has always been a complaint in government service. In 2002, a survey from the federal government's Office of Personnel Management found that only 36.1 percent of federal workers thought promotions in their work units were based on merit. (Government Executive Magazine, "Playing Favorites," by Brian Friel, October 2004). They believed that connections, partisanship, and other factors played a more important role.

Cronyism is a more specific form of favoritism, referring to partiality towards friends and associates. As the old saying goes, "It's not what you know but who you know," or, as blogger Danny Ferguson put it, "It's not what you don't know; it's who your college roommate knows." Cronyism occurs within a network of insiders-the "good ol' boys," who confer favors on one another.

Nepotism is an even narrower form of favoritism. Coming from the Italian word for nephew, it covers favoritism to members of the

family. Both nepotism and cronyism are often at work when political parties recruit candidates for public office.

### **What do favoritism, cronyism, and nepotism have to do with ethics?**

One of the most basic themes in ethics is fairness, stated this way by Aristotle: "Equals should be treated equally and unequals unequally." Favoritism, cronyism, and nepotism all interfere with fairness because they give undue advantage to someone who does not necessarily merit this treatment.

In the public sphere, favoritism, cronyism, and nepotism also undermine the common good. When someone is granted a position because of connections rather than because he or she has the best credentials and experience for the job, the service that person renders to the public often is inferior.

Also, because favoritism is often covert (few elected officials are foolish enough to show open partiality to friends, and family), this practice undercuts the transparency that should be part of governmental hiring and contracting processes.

What ethical dilemmas do favoritism, cronyism, and nepotism present?

Probably the biggest dilemma presented by favoritism is that, under various other names, few people see it as a problem. Connections, networking, family—almost everyone has drawn on these sources of support in job hunting in the private sphere. Substitute favoritism and the picture becomes clearer.

And everyone can point to instances where cronyism or nepotism is an accepted fact of life in a political sphere, as well. John F. Kennedy, for example, appointed his brother Robert as Attorney General. Every president and governor names close associates to key cabinet positions. Mayors put those they know and trust on citizens committees and commissions. Friends and family can usually be counted on for loyalty, and officeholders are in a good position to know their strengths.

## **So what's the problem?**

The first issue is competence. Without the pressure of favoritism, nepotism, or cronyism, for cabinet level positions, an executive will more than likely be drawn to experienced, qualified candidates, but historically, the lower down the ladder, the more likely it is for someone's brother-in-law to be slipped into a job for which he is not qualified.

The American Civil Service Act was passed in 1883 in large part because so many patronage jobs, down to dogcatcher, were being filled by people whose only qualification for employment was their support for a particular party or candidate. Also, the appearance of favoritism weakens morale in government service, not to mention public faith in the integrity of government. Everybody has been victimized in their career by favoritism so we all know this is true.

Reasonable people will differ about the appointment of friends and family in high-level positions, but public officials should be aware that such choices can give the appearance of unfairness. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 19 state legislatures have found the practice of nepotism troubling enough to enact laws against it. Others may restrict the hiring of relatives or friends in more general conflict-of-interest rules.

Public officials should also note that dilemmas involving favoritism extend beyond hiring and contracting practices to the more general problem of influence and more sleazy notion of influence peddling. Golfing partners, people who come over for Sunday dinner, members of the same congregation all are likely to exert a greater influence over an official than a stranger might. Think about it.

Council members, mayors, and legislators must make special efforts to ensure that they hear all sides of an issue rather than just relying on the views of the people they know. Furthermore, many conscientious lawmakers have discovered that they must change their patterns of socializing when their work involves many decisions affecting friends and associates. At the least, they may choose to recuse themselves from votes where social relationships may exert undue influence.

## **What is a school board?**

Most of us know that a school board consists of lay representatives – people who live in the community and are selected (elected) by the community. In some other communities, the school board can be appointed or the school board is selected by either the mayor or county freeholders.

In essence the members are your neighbors: parents, grandparents, local business owners, retirees – ordinary citizens. They are supposed to be non-partisan and they receive no pay or benefits for their public service. Since they come from the same community, technically, they share the same interests and concerns about the school district as do other residents of the community.

## **What is the role of the school board and the superintendent?**

The school board has a dual role: To represent the concerns of the citizens, taxpayers and parents to the school administrators, and to represent the needs of the students and school district to the citizens, taxpayers and parents of the community. The school board does not operate the district on a day-to-day basis; that is the job of the superintendent, who is the district's chief executive. Rather, the school board sets the policies, goals and objectives for the district – and it holds the superintendent responsible for implementing the policies and achieving the goals.

The superintendent is hired by the school board. While the board's focus is governance and oversight of management, the superintendent's focus is on implementation and management. The superintendent in many ways is the Chief Executive Officer of the School District—the top banana so to speak. It is also most often the paid position which commands the highest salary.

## **How does a superintendent get chosen by the board?**

The Reading Eagle says that there is way too much nepotism and cronyism in their school District. The same can be said of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. Some go so far as to say that in WBASD, the current Superintendent is the product of nepotism post facto.

Did the WBASB conduct a formal search for its superintendent? We discussed this in the beginning of the chapter.

In retrospect, looking at the District's state rankings in academic achievement as noted, the Board should have invested in a full search and it should have hired the best candidate for the position. We might joke about qualifications yet when results are factored in several years down the road, often it is clear that hiring an inferior person often delivers inferior results.

So, what are the qualifications to be a superintendent? When Dr. Holodick went to Colorado State University, he learned the answer. The school gave him the following criteria but first they gave him a jar of marbles like so:



It says on the front of the jar above in Gold letters Colorado State University. Every three-credit course completed the Department Dean would remove a marble. When you lost all your marbles you were declared a superintendent of schools.

In Pa. you must have at least a master's degree, and take specified course work, i.e. school law among many. In Luzerne County, a father on the board, now or previously, and a daddy-in-law who is a Pa. State Representative aided Brian Costello in his quest for the top position in the district.

Michael Buffer, Citizens Voice (local paper) reporter has labeled Brian Costello as *the boyish looking superintendent*. Costello continually validates the look by boyish (childish) behavior. Michael Buffer again outdid himself in labeling the WBASD Superintendent. In one of his headlines, Buffer stated "the *super* conducted tours of Mackin." He called him the *super*. Shortly after that headline, there were barbs all around Wilkes-Barre town showing superman with "little Brian's head superimposed."

Lack of respect for sure. It was not my idea but one cannot deny that it is a great way of having somebody else paint your adversary. Make no mistake about it folks, Brian Costello is not on the people's side in the battle of the Big Toxic school. All is fair in love and war. Thank you Citizens Voice. Thank you Michael Buffer. You and your paper made Brian Costello an easily identifiable man.

Chances are if a school board is accustomed to hiring relatives using a board member *pick vote*, they will also hire their Superintendent that way as they have a de facto practice of ignoring candidate's credentials and using relatives or friends' acclamation as in a *he said, she said* board voice acclamation.

A *pick vote*, by the way is a method in which qualifications of potential new hires be damned. Candidates do not have a chance unless they know a board member. At the hiring board meeting, board members bring up candidates' names they favor and the board votes them in. The board takes turns *picking* the candidate. It is a system designed to make sure the district gets only inferior new hires. No wonder the district has such poor results compared to others in the state. Did the *pick vote* the Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl site?

A lingering question occurs when we consider that the student's state rank was 144<sup>th</sup> of 500 when Jeffrey Namey was Superintendent and just eight years later, the district is at 443 out of 500? With such a poor record, can it be that Brian Costello was a beneficiary of WBASB nepotism / cronyism patronage?

Would the board have dared select him using a *pick vote*? Everybody, they say, in the whole Area liked Owen Costello, the current



Superintendent's dad, but that is not the point. The senior Costello was most certainly a respected WBA Board member for 16 years. Moreover, he was very pleased that his son Brian James Costello, the current WBASB Superintendent was appointed prior to his gaining the top position as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the District.

Nobody is now saying Owen Costello did not earn his board position. Nobody said that Costello Sr. or junior got their jobs because of nepotism but the relationship sure positioned him in the district as a member of what seemed to be one of the ruling families.

As noted above, in Luzerne County, a father on the board, now or previously, such as Owen Costello and a daddy-in-law who is a Pa. State Representative, such as The Honorable Eddie Day Pashinski, can pull a lot of power a candidate's way. For example, it may mean that less competent people can get top positions in the District. But, who knows if that happened in Costello's case?

The traditional employment of a person who never held the position of assistant superintendent or superintendent would typically mean that the individual would start for a lower salary and be given a three year "trial" contract." Yet, if favoritism is in play, the board might be inclined to start a person at a higher salary even though the board can bring in a neophyte employee for lots less of an impact on the taxpayers.

What does this say for "Little Brian Costello?" He clearly started at the highest salary ever paid in the WBASD and was awarded a five-year permanent contract—no trial run. How did that happen? Why not a lower salary and why not a typical three year test contract.

Costello is the "super." For sure. He is also *the boyish looking superintendent*. When you think of the word boyish, childish may also come to mind. Please think about the *super's* vendetta against the entire City of Wilkes-Barre, which played a big role in the Big Toxic School's location at Little Chernobyl.

When he was appointed superintendent as the youngest superintendent ever in the district, it was seemingly like a voice

acclamation. There was a formality of a token search but some say it was not a real search. Ask yourself again if a national search for such a top position can be considered “ paying the Pa. School Boards Association \$10,000 to conduct the search” Would this be a "formal search?" Not in the minds of many people who know. Check out the published results in the beginning of this chapter.

Is it not hard to believe that somebody coming from a superintendent position in another district could not out-match the scant experience of Brian Costello but neither Dr. Holodick nor I or anybody we knew got to ask any questions on the matter.

All we can say is” How did that work out with the district going straight to the bottom in achievement rankings in the state. ? Here we are four years later #443 out of 500 in the state and an almost one Big Toxic School on the Little Chernobyl site to show for it. Will the “super” make it to the end of his five year contract? Does he deserve to compete his contract?.

The bottom line is that there had not been an extensive search. Brian Costello was unanimously appointed district superintendent during a normal “pick vote” Tuesday school board meeting at the Solomon/Plains Junior High School in Plains Township. He took over when Bernard Prevuznak stepped down on September 1, 2016.

Besides his dad who served as an effective board member, Brian James Costello had some family members who worked for the District. For example, his wife was an elementary teacher in WBASD. Whether he needed it or not, to help get the 8-0 unanimous vote of the board for the position, Brian James had some spare political connections.

On Sept 1, 2016, Costello got a full promotion from his Curriculum Manager job to Superintendent and his salary became \$148,526. It was the highest salary in the District for one of the youngest employees. It had taken Prevuznak 35 years to make his grade by 2016. The average school superintendent salary in Pennsylvania is \$162,326 as of June 28, 2020, but the range typically falls between \$132,605 and \$195,880.

## Reading School District – Nepotism???

Nepotism and Cronyism are complaints in many PA school districts besides the Wilkes-Barre Area School District (WBASD). Let me tell a quick story about the Reading School District. In this Pennsylvania community, it has almost become a mantra: "It's all about who you know."

While school leaders deny its existence, there is a pervasive perception that the district is wrought with nepotism.

And many current and potential employees have the idea that friends and family members of school board members and administrators benefit unfairly because of their ties to school leaders.

Based on information provided by the district, 28 of 2,200 district employees are related to board members who have served in the past two years. Dozens of other district employees are noted as friends of board members.

J. Drue Miles, who served as acting superintendent, said nepotism is a dark cloud hanging over the district. No wonder Wilkes-Barre Area sees it as a natural thing.

There's an overabundant or uncommon amount of board members' relatives that are employed by the district," he said.

And that, he said, impacts how the district operates. "Absolutely, it certainly made our job, or the job of any administrator, much tougher," he said.

He said some topics or issues were changed, put on hold or simply avoided because they would impact friends or relatives of board members. One such instance was the decision to close the district over Christmas break, which gave employees, including family and friends of board members, extra days off.

The issue of nepotism was a recurring theme during hearings in September 2010 and February 2011 by the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission.

"Some prospective, current and past district employees perceive that nepotism negatively impacts recruitment, employment and retention decisions," according to a report created by the commission following the hearings.

The report notes that several witnesses at the hearings charged the district with nepotism.

### **Favoritism denied**

When asked about nepotism, most school board members didn't shy away from the fact that they have friends and family working in the district.

But they disputed accusations of favoritism.

Former board member John P. Santoro Jr., who district records show had three family members working in the district, declined to discuss how many of his friends and relatives were employed by the district.

But, he said, he considers a lot of district employees his friends.

"If you're talking friends, that list might be more like 100 because I have a lot of friends," Santoro said. "That doesn't mean I got them their jobs. I was on the board for 16 years; of course I'm going to have friends and know people who work for the district."

Other board members shared similar sentiments, saying that just because people they know work in the district doesn't mean they didn't get their jobs fair and square.

Current board member Harry P. Storch Jr. said one of the names on the list, Wendy Moll, is his daughter.

"She retired in November after 38 years as a teacher," Storch said. "She worked there long before I ever thought of running for the school board. How is that nepotism?"

Storch also acknowledged that his son, Michael Moll, is an electrician employed in the district maintenance department.

"These are all highly qualified teachers," Storch said. "A teacher has to go to four years of college and then get a teaching certificate. An electrician has to be trained and certified by the state."

Board members can't unilaterally hire district employees, Storch said.

"You have to have five votes or you're screwed," he said.

### **Qualifications defended**

Current Reading board member Pierre V. Cooper said his wife, her two sisters and a brother-in-law are employed by the district and are all highly qualified for the jobs they do. Their jobs include two education assistants, a teacher and a custodian.

Cooper said he also had a niece who was briefly employed as a security guard.

Current board member Isamac Torres-Figueroa said her mother and sister are employed by the district, but were hired before she was elected to the board.

Former board members Keith R. Stamm and Joseph R. Breton and current board member Robert F. Heebner Jr. did not return calls seeking comment.

Current Reading board member Karen H. McCree said she has one daughter working for the district and knows many other people who work for the district.

"One of the people I know got laid off last year, so if I'm using my influence to get people hired I'm not doing a very good job of it," McCree said, who then accused Miles of stirring up trouble. "It sounds to me like Mr. Miles should find better things to do with his time."

But despite board members' assurances, those around the district aren't convinced everything is on the up and up.

"I believe there are signs that would point to the existence or appearance of nepotism," said Bryan Sanguinito, president of the district's teachers' union. "Whether or not it truly exists, that is the perception."

Sanguinito said that, particularly with the district facing the possibilities of layoffs, it is important for the school board to be transparent and fair.

"We need to make sure the process is done fairly," he said. "I have great faith in the school board that it will be done fairly."

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\*\*\* End of Reading story

## **Do we know the WBASD hiring policy?**

### **Nepotism?**

Wilkes-Barre Area has no hiring policy that can be found though there have been some documented attempts to create one over the years. This became a big issue after the first of two board members were federally indicted in a pay-to-teach scheme where a prospective teacher's family paid to secure her a job.

Back then the policy was tacitly called "*get your wallet out.*" Such a lack of rules casts a shadow on the competency of teachers, administrators, and even superintendents when nepotism is excused and pay for play rules are used to get jobs. How can the public expect competence in its employees when the board does not evaluate credentials.

"It is not fair to the kids who have graduated 30 years ago with my older daughters that are teachers and teaching in Maryland, Georgia, Florida, all over but here because they don't know the right people. And that's not fair. It should be strictly on merit and it never was," said Heights resident Susan Gilbert.

To demonstrate the brazenous of the WBASB, regarding the possibility of nepotism policies, on June 20, 2015, the Times Leader printed an article titled: Zeroing In. Nepotism Alive and Well at Wilkes-Barre Area CTC. The on/again off /again nepotism policy was off again.

Fresh off their unpopular votes to close Meyers High School, spending about \$100 million to build a new school at Coughlin and not allowing the public to have a say about the matter in November's election, two Wilkes-Barre Area School Board members once again demonstrated they will do as they please.

What pleased them Monday night was hiring a few more relatives.

You GOTTA be kidding, you say. Why be surprised when this was simply business as usual for this group?

Remember the nepotism policy the Wilkes-Barre Area Career and Technical Center's joint operating committee discussed back in February? It's obviously still on the back burner collecting dust. But with good reason.

Board member John Quinn, one of WBA's representatives on the CTC board, said in March that any such policy this board passes must be done right.

So meanwhile, with no obstacle blocking its path, the CTC board voted to hire the niece of Louis Elmy and the daughter-in-law of Ned Evans. Elmy and Evans both represent WBA on the CTC board.

### **Business as usual**

Both directors are also kind of shameless. And so is the rest of the board's WBA contingent, Denise Thomas and Quinn, who voted for both hirings, and James Susek, who voted only for Elmy's niece. Don't they see or care how the public they just snubbed in their home district perceives this?

Elmy and Evans didn't vote for their relatives because they can't. So they abstained. But it's apparently acceptable for a board member to make the motion to hire his kin because Elmy, the personnel committee chairman, did just that. He wasn't at the meeting but participated via a conference call, the Times Leader reported.

So after he got the ball rolling, his fellow board members did the rest. And that's the way it's done at this school.

Crestwood School District representative Gene Mancini, who in March brought up the preposterous idea of implementing a nepotism policy at a school where nepotism reigns supreme, said he asked for an update at the April meeting. He said Quinn first corrected him that it was a hiring not a nepotism policy that was being considered. Then he informed him a board committee was discussing it.

Now don't laugh, but Ned Evans, who's daughter-in-law was hired recently, is on that committee. So we're guessing nepotism isn't a very big concern of his.

Regarding the job Elmy's niece, Samantha Elmy, got, administrative director Frank Majikes reassured everyone that she was the only candidate who applied for the newly-created \$32,000 position of child care group assistant. He also said the job was advertised "all over." So what's a board to do? Obviously be thankful that at least a board member's relative wanted it.

As for Evans' daughter-in-law Nicole Stella, Majikes said she was the best qualified candidate out of four or five interviewed for the \$15.72 per hour custodian job. He didn't need to tell us that. It's a given that when there's competition, more often than not the most qualified candidate just happens to be related to a school director.

This was in the local papers when Brian Costello was announced as the Superintendent of Schools for Wilkes-Barre Area School District. was

FYI, when he was appointed Superintendent by the board, the previous Superintendent had praise for Mr. Costello. "He has been a very loyal and very good assistant," Prevuznak said of Costello. "He has had opportunity and has, very honestly, been recruited by other school districts to be their superintendent. He has a deep affection for this district, our employees and our students."

We are so lucky!

Parts of this chapter were contributed by [mbuffer@citizensvoice.com](mailto:mbuffer@citizensvoice.com)



## Chapter 17 Failures in Competence, Morality and Legality.



When you read the next section, you may be convinced that there are a number of nefarious characters who serve in various capacities on the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board. Nobody really wants to take credit for this section of this chapter slangly titled *Credibility* so let's just say that a *Citizen Reporter* provided all of this information to us today

### **Credibility of the WBA School Board.**

If we were not trying to figure out how any school board could determine that it was prudent to destroy three beautiful community high schools any place but in our case, Wilkes-Barre City, and replace them with a monstrous consolidated toxic school built on a hazardous waste dump nicknamed *Little Chernobyl*, perhaps this chapter in this book would not have been necessary.

What board would do such a thing to Wilkes-Barre Area residents? The answer is the same board that would do the deeds highlighted in

the below headlines and detailed in the paragraphs that follow. We wish this were not true and that it did not have to be in this book. But, how else can we explain the types of characters who have existed in this School Board otherwise? Know that they have voted to undermine an entire city and its surrounding areas for no good reason. Nonetheless they did!

### HEADLINES:

- W-B Area Keeps Pizzella as President
- Former W-B Area Board President Faces Life In Prison
- Truth will set (President) Height free sooner
- Second WBA Director (President Thomas) in Hot Water

The lists of “leaders” as chosen by their peers have shattered the credibility of the governing body of a once nationally recognized school district. Fourth listed above is Denise Thomas. After her peers asked her to resign, they changed heart and gave her a unanimous vote to serve as board Vice President. Mr. Pizzella was indicted by the FBI, and a short time afterwards, he was honored by his peers, by unanimous vote to become the esteemed President of the board. Such is life in the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board if you go along to get along.

Moving down the ranks, pun intended, we have board member Ned Evans, not a WBASB officer, who posted on social media an opinion about an Arizona teacher having had oral sex with a student. Ned’s caring comment was, *“hope she didn’t break her teeth.”* Holodick and Kelly would not have included that comment if we had made it up.

This comment and the board reaction led to the local newspaper headline discussing eight board members and the superintendent requesting his resignation, “Evans insists he won’t go.” In another post, he referred to “fags & gays in those exact terms.” But, the public apparently doesn’t keep score and outrage dissipates quickly in these parts.

We include these to prove that only those with questionable character could vote to build a school for kids on top of a site that fits its billing: “Little Chernobyl.” What board would do that to a

community. If I may answer, it would be a board with minimal scruples that believed it had lifetime appointments.

Then, the board member in question apparently feeling strong when the board backed down made a post showing a naked woman requesting money. Ned posted “I would not pay 10 cents to see that bod.” I have been asked to show some other posts taken from social media from Ned Evans to help make the point about the members of the board who voted for The Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl.

“I slept with 12-13 yr olds arranged by scumbag pedifiler Jeffery Rpstien. He said on film/camera “grab um by the *puisse* “-- they love it.”

Pertaining to women: the same “censured” board member made a mockery of a crippled reporter on camera.” In addition to spelling errors he lists *Rpstiem* instead of Epstein.

The local chapter of the NAACP headline:



**“NAACP asks W-B Board member to resign.” &  
“Racism is Alive and well”**

This headline was repeated for Board member Denise Thomas. The reason, “for allegedly writing e-mails that attack people of color and those who are economically disadvantaged.” It was done when she

was an attendance clerk at GAR high school. She admitted that the over a dozen e-mails were from her computer, done by someone else while she was on coffee break. This however is the depreatory Face Book post that borders on racism. It may show probable cause Ms. Thomas wrote the e-mails.

Then we have another board member who fell asleep during a public board meeting, James Gieger. In a subsequent meeting he stayed awake by viewing a half-naked woman on his cell phone that was recorded by a citizen attending the meeting. The W-B police have responded to his home several times for alleged drug trafficking and possible prostitution. Just saying.

This board majority either doesn't know or doesn't care about the perceptions of the public regarding neglect in basic maintenance of facilities, rejecting 55 acres free, not getting a second opinion on historic Meyers High School, building a public school on a coal ash, toxic dump, the employment and contracting of services based on the size of the wallet or connections, an AG Schapiro quote, relating to DEP, WBA's watch dog.

At a board meeting Dr. Prevuznak the past Superintendent made the statement, "we can't do this alone we need your help." Long story short Save Our Schools was formed and spent 4 years plus trying to assist a board; whose president / board facility chair considered adversaries.

He told SOS President, Dr. Richard Holodick "you have a choice—SOS or the board." School Board President Joe Caffrey rejected Dr. Schiowitz for the external task force because he had a plan. That speaks volumes!

There are a lot of problems with the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. Besides the character flaws brought out in the Credibility section above, there is one major cause for all the problems the School District faces—bad management. You may recall this was a discussion point in a prior chapter. I might add that it appears that the management board and superintendent are not heavy on the caring part also. So, they make bad decisions and they do not care who those decisions hurt.

You may be able to count as high as ten fingers but you won't find more than one source for persistent problems. When a company puts out a bum product or has a bad marketing program or regularly hires incompetent people, who can we blame? Right, it is the company's or the organization's management.

Any problem that any organization suffers theoretically could have been overcome by excellent managers. You don't get to hire excellent managers however by using poor judgment and techniques such as favoritism, patronage, nepotism, and cronyism. See the last chapter for further details about the history of hiring new employees at WBA.

Superintendents are clearly highly visible actors in the American education system. As the highest ranking official in a school district, the superintendent receives a lot of credit when things go well, and they deserve just as much blame when they don't. In most areas of the state, a school district superintendent is largely a short-term job.

The typical superintendent has been in the job for three to four years. It is unusual for a superintendent with poor results to last more than three or four years. And, so, it just happens that the WBA Superintendent Costello completed four years in his position on September 1, 2020.

With its academic achievement one of the lowest ranked in the state, and the Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl, being an embarrassment to the area, should we expect the current young Superintendent to outlast the norm? If he does, what notable successes do you think that a retention contract would cite?

When things blow up in a business or in a school district despite management taking some action, it is typically because the organization happens to have bad managers, poor managers, or OK, let's call it what it is, incompetent managers. It is what it is and it will never change in any organization unless or until there is a major management philosophy change for the better.

Rest assured, everything that goes wrong in any organization is top management's fault. In a school district, that would mean it is the superintendent's fault unless the board recognizes it. Since the board

can fire the superintendent if they see incompetence and do not act, it would in this case, be the board's fault.

So as we dissect the problems which come to the surface rapidly when we examine Wilkes-Barre School District, knowing what we now know, are they all unsolvable if they ever were?

Looking at the outside barometers and thermometers that we see when we compare the district against others in the state of PA, do we find any problems?

In a recent "contest". When we looked at the school districts in various categories, and there are about 500 in the state, we found Wilkes-Barre Area hugging the bottom at a lofty 443 out of 500. If you lived in WBA and Brian Costello were your Superintendent, and you had a vote, would you recommend him for a bonus or for remedial training? It sure seems that the district is at the bottom of everything in area school district categories Tjumps up or down on Costello? Your call!.

The WBASB outlined a new venture in 2014 titled *Pathway to the Future*. Just like a lot of the initiatives the Board sets forth, they did not bring on the right horses to carry the heavy project load. For example the implementers simply did / do not have the experience to pull off the plan. What is the problem?

1. Seriously inexperienced superintendent
2. Four Architect firms with zero experience in large school restoration& sparse experience in large school construction

Other killers of the Pathway's progress include the fact that the Board chose to ignore / bypass its own internal and external task force committees. Moreover, one of its own board members was motivated to write an alternate plan of action. Also, he "publicly" requested the board take time out (moratorium) to get more information.

Not only is the Pathway team steering a sinking ship. It has brought the ship to the bottom academically and near the bottom in attendance performance in the state of PA.

Consolidation as a goal does not help matters. It is a proven method only if the goal is to reduce academic achievement. A big school will further reduce attendance. Moreover, when bussing is added to this isolated, toxic, “arsenic-ridden” coal ash dump, subsidence prone Little Chernobyl site, things will get even worse. Do you think that we are right around the corner from doomsday? If you do, will you take action in the next election?

P.S. All other districts interviewed in the “contest” had responses from the superintendent. Our Director responded also. He gave the excuse that WBA’s poor showing was because of a 76% poverty rate and that the state cut the funding short by \$33 million.

Yet, despite blaming being broke, the same Superintendent spearheads the monstrous spending of a HALF BILLION DOLLARS for a monument on a toxic hill that serves only a third of the Area students. Only inexperience can excuse the poor addition. It simply does not add up.

Was the superintendent trying to save taxpayer dollars when he paid 5x the value of the land for the school? Howabout when he authorized the purchase of 45 more acres than needed. He had two swimming pools, two-football stadiums, and 8 coach’s offices for part-time coaches. What “impoverished” community could afford that??? Answer, only one with an inexperienced superintendent who thought he could get away with mismanagement.

The “super” even spent a million dollars to expand the swimming pool for competitive events and the district still cannot host competitive events. And, the library is still way too small? Tell me please because I cannot figure it out. How does that accommodate a poverty-prone area?

The SOS group is always looking for some hope on the horizon regarding some authoritative body such as the PA Attorney General’s Office or the PA Auditor General’s Office or any official body to shut down the building of the Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl for the good of the people.

The Grand Jury is investigating DEP on their oversight of fracking. The Dept. of Interior, Washington DC is looking into DEP oversight of mining across Pa. The Attorney General wisecracked that the amount of oversight is dependent on the size of the wallet and Board connections.

There are also issues with waterways and runoff concerns? The fact is, the WBASB has committed both malfeasance and misfeasance in office and they need to be shut down for these crimes against the people. It would be nice if somebody from the state or the federal government would do their job and do the right thing.

Malfeasance in office or official misconduct is the commission of an unlawful act, done in an official capacity that affects the performance of official duties. This board could teach a graduate course in all forms of blank-feasance.

Malfeasance in office is often grounds for a just cause removal of an elected official by statute or a recall election. Malfeasance in office contrasts with "misfeasance in office," which is the commission of a lawful act done in an official capacity that improperly causes harm; and "nonfeasance in office," is the failure to perform an official duty. One word to describe the WBASB regarding all three mal, mis, and non-feasances in office—Guilty!

Nobody is giving up. For starters the SOS members of the Board will be making some basic common sense motions, even if they don't think they will pass. For example, there should be a motion to get a second opinion from restoration firms as to alternate uses for Meyers High School and costs. There should also be a district-wide study conducted of district employees, parents/guardians, and taxpayers.

Moreover, an RFP should be sought to develop a long-range curriculum/facility master plan. Why is there none now? Shouldn't the superintendent assure that one is followed?

Quite frankly if the majority of the board chooses not to go along with these very basic tools, it uncovers that there are hidden agendas. It would be time to get the hell off this board as it would be effective proof that the board is not supportive of the people. And, there may more than likely be criminal acts and fraud involved.



It is tough to find publicity in the papers or the TV stations or the Radio Stations in NEP about some secret truths about the goings on / the machinations of this board. Not too many in the public domain trust what is happening.

We need a spotlight on the malfeasance of this Board in the matter of the Big Toxic School. Perhaps Philly or Harrisburg, will spotlight what NEP chooses not to do. This sure is frustrating.

The board gets away with purchasing unreclaimed mining land, and pays 5 times the assessed value. Why? This is in violation of their own board action, not to mention common sense and ethics. They begins work on the site exceeding a million dollars, for a site not owned by the district.

And, the bragging Auditor General conducts what is supposed to be a clean and honest audit and for his own reasons that do not resemble the truth, he praises the district for what might have been criminal acts.

The board pays the Solicitor \$19,000 a month? That is a lot of money. Why? In my presence, and the former super, and the facility committee members, the solicitor said a zoning failure was impossible. He was assigned to negotiate the purchase. He convinced the board the property was worth \$4.2 million based on mineral rights; mineral rights were not in the deeds. He must not have read the deeds? Who got the excess money? This is misfeasance in office. Why is there no accountability?

It took a Back Mountain Realtor, who took the district to magistrate court to prove that there was something stinky in Dallas. Who paid for that? The Board's own solicitor convinced the board majority that the coal ash was safe as long as the students didn't dig down and actually eat the coal ash. How is that not malfeasance? (i.e. wrongdoing, especially by a public official)

This is all in the board minutes. Why did the Auditor General not find it? Nobody can tell a thinking person that none of the following

applies to this board—the six who voted for The Big Toxic High. They should be removed from office immediately.

There is enough hard evidence to which names can be attached that demonstrate some really stupid decisions. It is a disappointment that it may be tough to validate a board member, who we know watched half naked women on his cell phone during a meeting (provable) and who reportedly ran a house of ill-repute. What about a board member who referred to students as MooMoo's—a board member???

And there was another comment so gross I can't type it, in reference to young children of color. Summarize this paragraph with an inexperienced superintendent being paid a full salary; no in-house facilities expertise; four inexperienced architect firms selected by the same superintendent who were charged with the restoration activities. Was somebody trying to assure a high-cost failure?

How about the egregious untoward replacement of a board member using past nepotistic practices ahead of 15 outstanding dedicated applicants. How about this new member being a basketball coach/teacher whose children were not enrolled in the district—instead they were in a private school and the new appointed board member has never attended a board meeting. Somehow nepotism worked in the past as his brother was on the board and his wife was appointed to as a District Teacher while nepotism was seemingly in play.

### Summary of public grievances v the Board

1. Academic failure, highest dropout rate in the state fleeing to cyber and charter schools, highest truancy in the state, ranked 444th out of 501 school districts in state testing.
2. Poverty levels of the district residents, students, and fiscal condition of the school district. The half-billion dollar project with no master plan, and an outlandish expenditure for a third of the students, leaving 4500 students and six other aged facilities deficits. Zero impact studies prior to board actions.
3. History of board members fraud and FBI indictments.

4. Moral & Morale decay in the district.
5. Nepotism, cronyism, and employing and contracting with the inexperienced.
6. Gross neglect of three historic high schools, failing due diligence in restoration efforts.
7. Racism
8. Site selection & failure to assess property value resulting in a gross overpayment.
9. Questionable site purchasing procedure.
10. Consolidation, reasons for consolidation, and results of consolidation in other districts.
11. Apparent exclusive emphasis on sports v academics.
12. Impact potential removing all high schools from the city.
13. Profile of board members legal and moral issues. Board intimidation tactics.
14. Ignoring community input, major agencies, PDE, PSBA, AIA, and Pa. Historical Society, scholarly research, their own facility study, and state sponsored PFM financial study. Ignoring five other states that prohibit public schools NEAR contaminated sites, WBA builds on top of a contaminated site

How about this story, where did the money go, and on the same page left bottom, "Former W-B board President faces life in prison." This was at a time when major costly decisions were made by a convicted extortionist, along with a few other impaired board members. It was reported that \$10 million dollars was spent over the approved operational budget.

Here are a bunch of firsts for WBASD.

1. This stuff Never happened in the 100-year history of the district.
2. The employment of a superintendent with zero experience at the assistant or superintendent levels; past administrative experience 4 years as an assistant principal (student discipline); 4 years in the central office as director of curriculum, responsible for student's academic achievement. How did that work?
3. The traditional three-year contract for novice superintendent, ignored so he was awarded a 5-year contract. Could this be unrelated to his dad a previous board member, or his father-in-law being a state representative.
4. Starting salary, \$148,000, the salary it took the previous superintendent with massive experience including assistant superintendent, 20 years to reach.
5. Board member, with an apparent alcohol abuse problem, posted on social media the humor in an Az teacher having oral sex with a student. This came off as so egregious that the 8 other board members and the superintendent requested his resignation.
6. A former district clerk elected to the board had 13 e-mails found on her school district computer that were racist and put down disadvantaged children; claimed someone else used her computer when she was on break.
7. She was elected to the board presidency, and vice president at a time when the board was desperate for experienced leadership.
8. Headline 2nd board member in hot water. Her posts on social media add to the probability of her sending the racial e-mails.
9. Former board president Elmy facing a life sentence.
10. FBI indicted board member elected board president a short time AFTER the indictment.

# Chapter 18 Robin Shudak SOS, Her DEP Report



<<< Robin Shudak

Robin Shudak

The Save Our Schools Group (SOS) has a lot of smart people on the team to help fight the misinformation provided to the public by the Board and its lackies in this project.

This is a report from Robin Shudak, about the chemical issues on the Big Toxic School Site. Here goes:

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Thank you for granting this conference and for the opportunity to speak. My objections to the Stage I, II, and III bond release on SMP 408-402-06 are based on the following regulations regarding third party encroachment, vegetation standards, and general liability.

## **Encroachment**

In their May 9, 2019, Completion Report Narrative, Jeddo Highland requested release on the permit due to third-party encroachment.

However, the Department's Standard Operating Procedures for Third-Party Interference (September 2016) suggest this reason may not be applicable to this circumstance.

The 2016 document sites five reasons for consideration:

1. The third-party's role in the interference
2. Whether the third party's activity is beyond the permittee's control
3. How the interference affects the permittee's ability to achieve the post-mining land use
4. Whether the interference has the potential to cause environmental harm to air, water, or land resources or danger to the public health and safety
5. The size and scope of the area under review

It is well documented, by DEP, the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board (WBASB), and local press that Jeddo-Highland and the WBASB worked in concert for almost two years before Jeddo-Highland made the encroachment claim.

In December of 2018, the WBASB purchased the land (which was not for sale) from Jeddo-Highland with plans to build a high school on the site. Previous to the sale, as early as February of 2017, this third-party and its contractors worked with Jeddo Highland to prepare the land. In May 2018, they signed a sales agreement and negotiated a purchase price.

In August 2018 and April 2019 Jeddo-Highland obtained permits for WBASB's contractors to work on the land. This work covered the

entire permit area (77 acres), and included, but was not limited to: to bringing the land grade, to relocating ash, and adding sump areas.

Thus, WBASB's role of 'interference' appears to be more one of cooperation with Jeddo Highland. And, therefore, it was under the permittees's control to disallow this use.

Additionally, because of the cooperation, this interference does not necessarily affect Jeddo-Highland's ability to its achieve post mining land use of unmanaged natural habitat.

The land may still be conventionally reclaimed, with the concomitant revegetation period requirements.

It should be noted that the last inspection report (May 2016) reported only three acres had actually even been planted and only 19 had been re-graded. This resulted in a violation and updated reclamation schedule. Jeddo-Highland was supposed to resume reclamation in the 2017 planting season. However the rainy conditions of that summer did not make revegetation likely. Satellite photos from google maps showing the area and extent (or lack) of revegetation.

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Thus, the current state of the site does have the potential to cause environmental harm and a danger to public health, because the WBASB has begun to build on unreclaimed land.

WBASB's own team sampled soil and found levels of arsenic, cadmium, and chromium over SHS in many places on the 77 acres.

Yet, on August 28, 2018 and again on April 10, 2019, the Jeddo Highland was approved to relocate ash "uncovered in the process of site development," which included grading the site.

Neighboring residential areas have experienced erosion and sedimentation problems. The Susquehanna River is less than 700 feet from the site, and less than 300 feet from the areas where yellow-orange sediment was found. This may be due to the work on the site.

More importantly, [it] is unclear if appropriate monitoring is taking place on this relocated ash. Though done under a surface mining permit, it may be prudent to remember the regulations for coal ash disposal, as this third party has been relocating ash for at least one year. The PA Code has its a separate set of permitting and operational regulations for such activity, set out in 25 PA code 90.31, including the requirement for stream buffer zones (100 feet) and maximum depth of coal ash piles (2 feet).

### **Vegetation Standards**

As previously stated, a May 26, 2016, inspection reported only three acres had actually even been planted and only 19 had been re-graded. This resulted in a violation and updated reclamation schedule.

However, even if Jeddo-Highland had continued to revegetate at this pace, those three acres would still not be ready for release, as 25 PA Code § 88.216 states:

The permittee shall assume responsibility for successful vegetation for 5 consecutive years after initial planting and the standard for success has been met for 2 consecutive years.

### **General Liability**

25 Pa Code § 86.151 c) states liability under bonds posted for coal refuse disposal activities shall continue for the duration of the activities and for 5 years after the last year of augmented seeding and fertilizing and other work to complete reclamation to meet the requirements of the acts, regulations adopted thereunder, the conditions of the permit and to otherwise protect the environment. Additionally, liability under the bond related to the risk of water pollution from activities shall continue for a period of time after completion of the coal refuse disposal activities. Though the ash is being relocated from one area of the 77-acre site to another, the Susquehanna River is less than 700 feet from the site, and less than 300 feet from the areas where yellow-orange sediment was found.



## **Conclusion**

For the aforementioned reasons, I believe it is premature to release Jeddo Highland's bond. I humbly ask that you not release them from the responsibility of reclamation. Because they have used and benefited from the ownership of the land and permit, it should be their responsibility to observe the monitoring, control, and reclamation duties such a permit lawfully demands.

If this is unreasonable, I believe it best in the public interest (environment and health) to require the WBASB to cease and desist operations on the law and apply for a permit to relocate coal ash under 25 Pa Code § 90.

Sincerely,  
Robin Shudak



## Chapter 19 A Small Rust Belt City Languishes



### Life in the new WBASD is unhealthy

In a small rust belt city, the epicenter of Pennsylvania's pivot from Obama to Trump, a town with a tradition of corruption, including the "Kids for Cash" scandal, a sordid tale looms. What began as a cynical school board using its aging and neglected high schools to satisfy its appetite for an unjustifiable high school consolidation and 6A football, has morphed to a community's struggle to assure input, adherence to educational principals, fiscal responsibility, and now, the very health of its children.

Without a master plan, community outreach, or school siting tools such as those provided by EPA, and after throwing away \$5 million on a site that didn't have zoning approval, the school board selected the worst possible parcel of land this side of Chernobyl. They plan to put 2500 students on a site without access or infrastructure, with no pedestrian access—that will require 100% busing while the existing constituent schools allowed 70% of students to walk.

The true brilliance lies in the land's former uses, first deep coal mining, then surface mining, then ten years as an unlined toxic coal ash landfill. A major expressway with major air pollution potential is a "stone's throw" away. The remediation plan, "cap in place," is inferior to coal ash removal and, in places, will amount to less than a foot of soil obtained from the site, a site which looks much like the back side of the moon.

Arsenic in the soil exceeds permissible concentrations for residential use. There has been no assay for expected and toxic hexavalent chromium or uranium decay products, common in ash. The land is a mixing bowl of carcinogens. Five states would not permit a school even near such toxic coal ash. The EPA has opined that ash is a health risk greater than smoking. Of 900 workers who had intimate and daily contact with coal ash after a pond spill in Tennessee ten years ago, 43 are dead and 300 are sick or dying.

The public in Wilkes-Barre Area ask the School Board how they could think such a site is good for students and teachers and others to pollute their lungs with the debris from years of accumulated contamination.

Industry experts concluded years ago that the disposal of coal combustion waste in coal mines is poisonous to streams and drinking water supplies across the country. The solid waste generated by burning coal in power plants (the type of waste in the Big Toxic School on the Little Chernobyl Site) is the second largest industrial waste stream in the United States. In fact, enough coal combustion waste (CCW) is generated each year in the United States to fill a train stretching from Washington, D.C. to Melbourne, Australia.

With no federal standards for disposal of coal combustion waste, more commonly referred to as coal ash, companies often dump it in locations that allow numerous toxic constituents to leach, or dissolve, out of the waste and into nearby streams, ponds, rivers, lakes and other waters. From New Mexico to North Carolina, on up through Pennsylvania, water contaminated by coal combustion waste has poisoned communities and killed fish and livestock.

In December 2008, a dike constructed of ash for a coal ash sludge impoundment failed at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston

Fossil Plant in Harriman, Tennessee. Think of the magnitude of this failure in a site that for years was studied for its greatness in every grade school and high school in the nation.

We learned that the most **successful** New Deal program created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the **Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)**. The **TVA** was **successful** in decentralizing power and control and increasing the standard of living for the inhabitants of the southeastern United States (US).

The EPA unfortunately takes building a school for 2200 children on a remote burg in Plains Twp PA, on top of a toxic mine dump lightly—because nobody in the country knows about it. That is going to change because of this book and others. The EPA may very well react to the squeaky wheel as in all things in life, the big squeaky wheel gets the most grease.

The TVA, a big fish in a big pond, literally could not hide away out of sight. And so when independent fish sampling results found high levels of toxic chemicals in Kingston, TN fly ash deposits and Emory River fish on 5-18-09, the EPA was forced to take action to please the public. Let's hope the pattern continues with the Big Toxic School Pennsylvania incident. So far Pennsylvania's DEP has taken no action. WBA must have very powerful politicians.

Preliminary analyses of ash, water, sediments, and fish tissues collected near the TVA spill site 18 days following the dike failure revealed the following:

- 1) the total recoverable toxic elements arsenic, barium, cadmium, lead, and selenium in water exceeded protective drinking water and/or aquatic life criteria levels;
- 2) ash and ash-laden river sediments had arsenic levels that exceeded the EPA removal limits; selenium levels increased dramatically downstream of the spill;
- 3) selenium levels in fish were at and beyond the thresholds of toxicity for reproduction and growth;

4) fish suffered internal and external impacts from the spill, with abnormal changes to gills in particular;

5) detailed analysis of floating ash particles (cenospheres) found that approximately 10% of these particles contain an iron oxide coating that may be transporting arsenic into water.

Think of the damage to 2200 kids breathing in toxic ash fumes with nobody monitoring their health in Plains TWP's own Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl. How are we even to judge who needs assistance and how will they receive it, when the state of PA and the EPA says it is OK? They know but they think that by being silent, they can save the effort.

The TVA failure caused the release of over 1 billion gallons of toxic coal ash sludge over 300 acres, poisoning streams and rivers with unsafe amounts of arsenic, lead, chromium, thallium, and other toxic metals. That's the stuff the school building in Plains Twp. and all 100+ acres exposes. Help for Wilkes-Barre Area please.

Despite the risk of life-threatening disasters like the one that occurred in Tennessee, and the extensive, documented damage to human health and the environment by coal ash throughout the U.S., there are still no specific federal regulations governing the disposal of this waste.

When the Save Our Schools group alerted the DEP and the EPA, it was looked upon as a lesser event than a voice crying out in a desert. It was ignored like kids breathing carcinogens did not matter. Local and state and federal corrupt politics prevailed. The people be damned. The biggest risk for authorities seemed to be that if action was taken somebody's wallet would not grow.

In the absence of federal regulations, many states continue to allow dumping of coal ash into unlined mine pits, where the waste's toxic constituents can migrate unimpeded into groundwater. Dumping coal combustion waste into mines is especially dangerous because mining often creates conditions that allow for more rapid contamination of adjacent groundwater. Based on mine disposal rates in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Texas, North Dakota, and New Mexico, plus conservative estimates of mine

disposal in seven other coal basin states, we estimate that approximately 24 to 25 million tons of CCW, or 20 percent of generation, are mine filled each year.

Under these conditions, the waste's toxic contaminants, including arsenic, cadmium, chromium, lead, selenium and thallium, can readily pollute streams and drinking water. The disturbed land in this toxic dump from the building of the Big Toxic School on the top Little Chernobyl mountain with housing developments built on the way up the mountain is already polluting residences.

Inevitably, it will go on polluting for years to come after the big concrete toxic school complex and the big football stadium is built and the residents either move out or are deceased from the poisonous runoff. Not a pretty thought. But true, nonetheless.

The DEP and the EPA if interested enough to stop this travesty could prove for the students, teachers, workers, and residents that these chemicals can result in a number of health effects in humans, including neurological damage, cancer, and reproductive failure, as well as widespread ecosystem damage. Why let this scourge happen? If the SOS group had the funding, you can bet like Erin Brockavich, that there would be a big lawsuit.

Federal regulations and Federal action in Plains Twp. were needed to ensure that essential safeguards were in place before coal combustion waste was disposed of in coal mines. But, safety was ignored. These safeguards would have ensured that companies would reveal the toxicity of the waste they were dumping, identify sources of groundwater and surface water that are susceptible to contamination from the dumping, and prohibit the disposal of waste directly into groundwater. Surely nobody in their right mind would permit over \$120 million to be spent on a school for over 2000 students who would be breathing pollutants every day and drinking polluted water.

The WBASB was made aware of the problems but they denied their possibility despite the facts. Federal regulations should have required long-term, comprehensive monitoring for pollution from the dumping, and ensure that mine owners were held financially

responsible for the required clean up—especially when the intended use of the site is a school complex. What could be more serious?

Because state regulations uniformly fail to require these safeguards, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency must immediately act to establish federal minimum standards that ensure full protection of human health and the environment in coalfield communities.

SOS suggests that the Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl be the test case and the testing should begin immediately—right after a cease and desist order is issued for the completion of the school. If anybody out there can afford the justice needed, please contact Dr. Richard Holodick, Save our Schools President, and he will immediately make you one of the team.

Environmental jurisdiction and assistance for concerned citizens is muddled: EPA is the only agency with a coal ash rule which includes guidance on shutting down landfills, but they have no jurisdiction on mining land. The Office of Surface Mining of Department of Interior, has not yet formulated a coal ash rule. Traditionally, these entities defer to the state, anyway. Pennsylvania's DEP involvement is split between two offices, is mining friendly, and very interested in re-purposing scarred mining land. That's laudable, but not this land for this purpose.

Adding to the mystery, the land was assessed between \$200,000 and \$800,000 but purchased from the mining company of dubious background, for \$4.2 million. NOTE: These three bullet points are the Golden Bullets for curriculum driving facility needs, a protocol for the students academic achievement getting them off the bottom statewide.

The mining permit is still active and held by that company, and the bond ensuring land reclamation, which ordinarily predates sale, is still held by the mining company. Despite that, the district's contractors have been busily "compacting" the site at public expense, that is, doing the reclamation work of Pagnotti Enterprises on the WBASD dime.

Adding to the concern is the behavior of capped heavy metals and ash so near the Susquehanna River which is about 400 meters



downgrade from this site. It serves as a drinking water source for distant communities and is the Chesapeake Bay's largest tributary. There is potential for leaching toxins. Neighbors have witnessed subsidence and sludge in yards since compaction began; an orange trail is visible via Google Earth near the site and apparently extending to the river.

As a physician, I am concerned about a chronic disease and cancer cluster at this site. Our board majority sports a home chemistry kit background, at best. Listening to the engineers they have retained for years and will benefit from the project, as well as DEP, which has never uttered the word, "safe," they press on, protesting the safety of this cesspool.

Protests, letters, and public testimony have fallen on deaf ears. I hope you will wish to look into this. Representatives of Environmental Integrity Project have called this site "unprecedented." The Wilkes-Barre, Pa. community agrees. Perhaps some attention from an authoritative and neutral source might hold the feet of these self-important bureaucrats to the fire.

By  
Dr Mark Schiowitz with parts added by Brian Kelly

PS If you are able to underwrite a lawsuit, please contact Dr. Holodick at SOS at the Wilkes-Barre Area Save Our Schools Facebook Forum



## Chapter 20 Four Perpetrators



It is a difficult task in this true saga about the Wilkes-Barre Area School board to find a hero, though a number of people, including the principals in the Save our Schools Group, most notably Dave Wilson and Dr. Schiowitz, would love to make the right things happen for the board to change its mind and reverse course. And of course for this to work, they would have to find the funding to pay the contractors for their construction efforts so far. The fact that the monstrosity is still being built, there can be no real heroes even though there are a bunch of good guys on the team trying to put an end to the nightmare.

The people sorely need a break that a true act of heroism and generosity may bring but none are expected because this board is incorrigible and intransigent. Worse than that, more often than not, they vote the wrong way, on issues of vital importance to their community.

However, despite a lack of heroes for our cause, this chapter finds at least four candidates who in fact are a kind of protagonist meaning they are the focus characters in the mostly untold parts of this story. They are leaders of their organization (WBASD) who sometimes

have the type of morality that we the regular people traditionally have come to associate with bad guys.

We can call them anti-heroes as they fit the bill. Anti-heroes can be defined as a central character in a story, movie, or drama who lacks conventional heroic attributes. In other words an anti-hero is simply a real bad guy. It is that simple. WBASD has its share of anti-heroes. Most of our identified anti-heroes are not on the board . This chapter highlights four of them and we show why. This chapter also suggests that there may be a fifth anti-hero, who like the others, instead of helping, choose to ignore our plight.

Anti-heroes such as our protagonists associated with the WBASD are as flawed or more flawed than most characters even in a true story such as this. Let me call the bad guys in our sad story in this book anti-heroes for the definition surely fits:

Anti-heroes are often the some-ones who disturb the story scenario and more during the telling of the story for readers. You will see their many weaknesses, sometimes sympathetically portrayed in other local stories other than one like this. They magnify the frailties of humanity as they peep about to find themselves performing misdeed after misdeed. Despite evidence that what they possess should help them be better people, this group of anti-heroes can't seem to help themselves avoid a trip to the dark side.

In this book we have four such anti-heroes agents who would best be characterized in plain English as perpetrators. They are real people associated with the WBASD story. Their names are as follows:

1. Superintendent of Schools Brian James Costello, employee
2. Solicitor Ray Wendoloski, contracted paid legal agent
3. Board President /faculty chair Joseph Caffrey, unpaid elected position
4. Auditor General, State of Pennsylvania, Eugene DePasquale

The fifth anti-hero is Josh Shapiro, PA's Attorney general and candidate for another go at Attorney General. Shapiro has done little to nothing for WBA. He has been twiddling and perhaps fiddling while Little Chernobyl burns.

We're not taking sides in the recent presidential election but Josh Shapiro has and he is supposed to be the arbiter of truth. His GOP opponent, Heather Heidelbaugh accuses Shapiro of declaring on social media that President Donald Trump would lose Pennsylvania and as his opponent, not wanting him to decide if he wins or not, she called for Shapiro to appoint an impartial deputy to oversee any legal questions and disputes that may come into play as a result of the election.

Based on what Shapiro has done to put out the fires in NEPA, we know he will do whatever it takes to help Josh Shapiro. Shapiro does add to the corruption point of view of this sad story. Maybe by the time we sign off this chapter he will become a full fifth anti-hero. We'll see.

Any one of the four could have shed their anti-hero perpetrator status at any time during the battle in the WBASD. They could have become a bona fide hero reformer. All that they had to do was change sides, thereby altering the course of the project and creating a better outcome.

This would have made the taxpayers, the parents, and the students of the WBA real winners in this saga. The fact that none of them has emerged as a reformer and in fact, they instead dug themselves deeper into this morass, shows the soul-less nature of anti-heroes which they truly are.

In this book, we speak about the apparent corruption, poor management and poor governance of the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board. To understand this, it helps to know how the WBASD has operated in the distant and recent past. The conversion of *stinkin* *thinkin* was spelled out in the scholarly research. How?

There have been neighboring school districts that consolidated and things went south immediately. Sadly in the board's own commissioned studies, the projected results saw the project revolving around the Bog Toxic School at Little Chernobyl costing millions while failing big-time. Yet, they ignored the facts and took the school district to verge of perdition.

The top employee in the district is the Superintendent, who oversees the academic achievement of the students. If the students fail, it is his fault. If they succeed, he gets the credit. In WBA, the nine-member school board, led by its president, Joseph Caffrey and Vice President Denise Thomas, wield most of the power.

Although the public believes that the solicitor should be included as an anti-hero, my writing partner does not believe he should wield all the power that he does. His take is that Ray Wendeloski is a paid contractor with no loyalties to the district other than the district sends him a ginormous check every month.

For years, these individuals have let the regular people down. The board knows what it has done. In fact everybody knows. Their record has not been sterling to say the least as many board members and/or board leaders have gone afoul of the law and some have even done hard time in the Big House. Some say that WBASD has been in bad shape for the past fifty years and this may be true compared with the early days when the public were miners who made sure their children were educated properly by making sure the district leaders were competent and above all else, that they served the students well.

Facts are hard to refute. When Dr. Jeffrey Namey was the Superintendent for over twenty years, there were many who did not like his style, but few would disagree that he consistently got the job done. Eight years after Namey, there is a cry to have the district run again as in the Namey years. But, with a paid solicitor whose mission it is to prove that every nasty illegal board move is legal, the people have little chance to effect change. There is not even one legal employee who works for the district. That ain't right, folks! It creates what we have—the appearance of corruption. Heck, being frank, it is not just appearance, what is going on has the smell of real corruption.

An organization does not go to hell overnight but when the top positions are replaced in an organization that is doing reasonably well, there is often a major decline in performance. During the period in which Jeffrey Namey was the Superintendent of Schools for the district, there was a ray of light and a breath of fresh air in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Among other things, it was obvious to all that Jeff Namey cared about his job, the employees, and the people of the district.



Dr. Jeffrey Namey

There were a lot of bad things perpetrated by the board at the time but Dr. Namey was able to stay above the fray. If he had some negatives, for the most part, his positives made up for it and the district ran like clockwork. It was a smooth operating machine.

Dr. Namey was as most superintendents, both appreciated and disliked. What he was in many opinions, was a master magician in holding for about 20 years the top position in WBASD. Unfortunately, he did not have the most honest school boards with which to work. Not much seems to have changed with regard to that part of official WBASD.

Namey reported to an extremely political, fraudulent, underhanded, pay to play board. Three of the board members went to federal prison for their pay to play activities. The district faced major devastation

and recovery after the 1972 flood but it survived. In 2012, Dr. Namey chose to retire after a fine career with the district. He served in a number of key positions prior to achieving the level of Superintendent. He could have withstood a major audit and earn a commendation that was real.

I happened to live less than a block from Jeff Namey growing up. He lived across Blackman Street, an in-town highway in Wilkes-Barre. That street was so busy that Jeff and I did not see each other much growing up. But, we did know each other and were always cordial. His brother Lee who passed away suddenly a few years ago was a very effective Mayor of Wilkes-Barre City. I knew Lee better than I knew Jeff. Lee was one of the greatest football and track stars in the Wyoming Valley. He broke 100-yard dash records, and he was an all-state football player several years. He was three years ahead of me at Meyers.

Jeffrey was one year ahead of me in school. We both played some football for Meyers but neither of us were Lee Namey. About six of us from the High Street area went to Meyers football practice together in the summer. Jeff drove his big family car and kindly took us all both ways twice a day. The Rolling Mill Hill section of WB, from which we all hailed, was a good twenty-minute walk from the football lockers so we appreciated the ride. Meyers was a great football power back then having won the championship four years in a row and then again in 1964, my senior year. Ironically the year missing, 1963 was Jeff's senior year. But, the Meyers Mohawk team was very competitive even then.

I ran into Jeff the next time after high school when he was in charge of the ATP Advanced Placement for young gifted students for the WBASD. Jeff asked my wife Pat and I to meet with him about our son Brian who had tested as gifted. While we were moving to a new WB neighborhood, we had forgotten to register for the parochial schools in our new WB neighborhood. It was an unforgivable mistake to the Catholic schools we tried. They said our son would have to wait a year before he could begin because we had missed the deadline by a month. This fact did not come up with Dr. Namey in our meeting.



Dr. Namey presented the ATP program to us and made a case for enrolling our son Brian in the program. After our bad experience with the Catholic School registration process, we could not believe that for the ATP program, the best for kids in the whole area, Jeff Namey through the WBASD was trying to convince us to enroll our child after we had been admonished by the parochial school system.

We had never even thought about sending our kids to public school. But let me tell you Jeff Namey represented the ATP program and the WBASD quite well and he gave us some time to think about it. We then agreed and enrolled Brian in the program. Both Pat and I were impressed with the professionalism shown by Dr. Namey and he had all the answers, and they were convincing. I can see why he was such a competent leader and why the district still misses him. Brian did very well in the program.

As noted, Dr. Namey retired quietly without a big party or a splash. When he left WBASD, he left a an almost \$20 million surplus. Moreover, at the time, the students were ranked 144th out of 500 districts in PA. Our students were in the top third. From where the WBASD is today, it would take a strong telescope to see 144th place. What happened was a change in school district management. Sometimes nepotism and cronyism does not yield the most favorable results.

Both of your authors are great believers in great coaching and great leadership in business. It is a fact that an organization does not typically go to hell overnight. It usually takes time. However, when the top positions are replaced in an organization that is doing reasonably well, there is often a major decline in performance achievement. In the case of Wilkes-Barre Area School District, it was immediate, and it continues to this day. It is as if bad management is contagious.

Considering bad managers often have a role in appointing their replacements, it is understandable that the cure for bad management often involves a major organizational shakeup. For WBASD, after Dr. Jeffrey Namey, the mantra changed to *comme ci, comme ca* (pronounced come see, come saw).

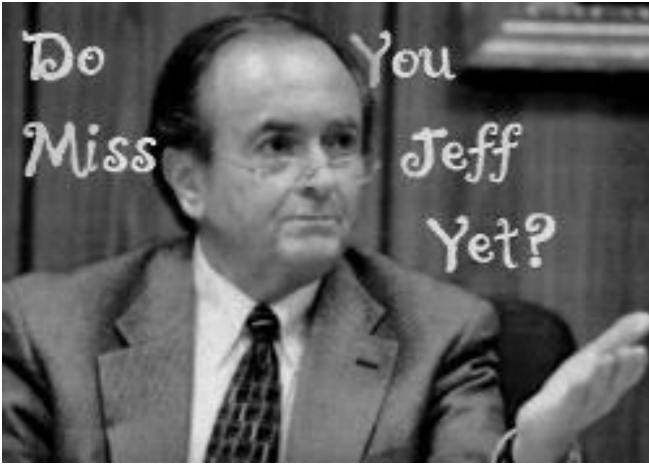
To be motivated to change, management must think there is a valid reason. They have to be smart enough to recognize their sinking ship before it sinks. Despite its continual decline and failing, WBASD did not see its own incompetence and they used the status quo as their guide to the future. We've always done it this way so why change? Well, when all you get are poor decisions such as a Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl, it is time to do something different.

Based on the accuracy of their records, just four years later, the district faced an \$8 million plus deficit, heading for what portends to be a greater than \$300 million dollar debt. Four years after this in 2020, the students are ranked 443rd out of 500 school districts. The new novice superintendent has steered the district to many unnecessary losses such as \$6 million unanswered taxpayers dollars spent, by attempting to put a school where public schools are verboten by zoning.

His antics have not been very positive-for the district. For example, he supported an educational building plan that segregated the school with the most minority students that led to the local papers headline *Racism is alive and well*. Under oath, the novice superintendent said that "GAR students will not be in the new school."

He continues to support building a public school at a site near which five states would not permit a grade school or a high school to exist, not to mention to be built anew. Perhaps worse than that, the superintendent does not regret this poor decision. Without his firm resolve to complete this unwise project, the board may have recanted. This school site is based on coal ash (It is an unlined coal ash landfill). Coal ash is a carcinogenic and associated with respiratory illness and developmental abnormalities. Why do this?

Add contaminated soil, documented subsidence, the likelihood of radioactive nanoparticles, contaminated ground water, and hazardous water runoff onto the neighborhood downstream housing developments. More people than expected offer these three words when discussing the WBASD as it exists in the past eight years:



*“I miss Jeff.”*

Lets look at some of the negative accomplishments of the four individuals cited earlier in this chapter. We will begin with the two who, by definition work together closely

1. Superintendent of Schools Brian James Costello, employee
2. Board President Joseph Caffrey, unpaid elected position

Note; Costello praised Caffrey for his accomplishments (all he did). Caffrey said that he did not deserve all the credit. Authors note: Yes he does but we would not refer to it as credit.

### **How about BLAME?**

Clearly with Board Approval, meaning Joseph Caffrey as unpaid president, and the Superintendent, Brian Costello, the only paid employee on the top management team, for as long as it existed, the Wilkes-Barre Area School District did not hire a maintenance staff and did not put in a preventive maintenance plan. Thus, as time went by, most of the districts buildings came to the point in which building consultants would not put up much of an argument about demolishing the buildings and creating new ones. In other words, they were totally neglected.

Of course the fact that the District’s leaders—Caffrey and Costello mismanaged funds during the post-Namey period. Thus, there was

no money to hire a staff to repair or replace district buildings. This exacerbated the deterioration situation. Moreover, even when they considered a new building project, they still chose not to create a preventive maintenance plan or hire an engineer or architect to oversee their vast real estate holdings that at one point had a value of \$300 million. If they had an in-house team of people who understood how to maintain buildings, they could have avoided the need to replace buildings.

They did not even hire one high-level person to assure that buildings were maintained as best as they could. In a form of cover-up for this major failing, they clearly preferred these oversights not be mentioned even to the Auditor General. These misdeeds for example, are not cited in the Auditor General's 2020 report findings. How could the Auditor General have missed this non-trivial fact. W

There are numerous malfeasance instances in which the board clearly wasted money with Joe Caffrey as the leader of the board. An area that we did not highlight enough yet is the excessive salary paid to a novice superintendent and others as well as an astronomical fee agreed to by the Joe Caffrey board of directors for Solicitor Ray Wendoloski.

Despite the high fees he receives, the solicitor is still not an employee of the WBASD. He has multiple allegiances to other legal accounts of his. So despite the astronomical Wendoloski "salary," the board has not assured that the solicitor works only on WBASD matters. There is not even a clause to assure that Wendoloski does not work against the WBASD in other matters. Let's look at this in more detail.

## 2. Solicitor Ray Wendoloski, contracted paid legal agent

Legal services as provided to WBASD are considered professional services, which can be purchased without competitive bidding. School districts and agencies typically do not seek competitive bids, quotes or proposals when buying legal services. Some might say it is a great opportunity for a cronyism deal for a lucky somebody.

Pay rates vary, and payments can be based on fixed retainers or hourly fees. Sometimes solicitors also get health insurance benefits

including their fees. Some get the same benefits that go to regular school employees.

Wilkes-Barre Area solicitor Raymond Wendolowski receives the highest retainer among all the school district solicitors in Luzerne County. Since the school board first approved the \$195,000-a-year retainer in 2012, critics have complained about the huge expense paid every year by an impoverished school district.

Perhaps we should examine the \$195,000 per year to see if somehow as employees such as Costello were receiving huge raises, perhaps the Solicitor, who helps make WBASB policy, was able to slip in a few extra invoices. Just saying. Would they have been paid?

By the way, Wendolowski argues that he does most of the legal work for the district, noting the cost of Wilkes-Barre Area's legal services "is in line with" what other area districts pay per student. He added his firm, not the district, pays for support work and costs. "The retainer has proven to be successful and has lowered costs," Wendolowski said.

Now, folks, I am no babe in the woods on this so I sense a stinky aura to this sweet deal. Is Ray Wendoloski the judge and the jury of his worth to the district. He is certainly a 100% advocate of the Board's plans for the Big Toxic High at Little Chernobyl. Loyalty is often rewarded in political settings in which a solicitor engages, such as WBASD. But who knows? Certainly Aud Gen DePasquale saw no mal or misfeasance but did he look hard enough? Many think not

Payscale.com posts the average starting salary for a new lawyer on their web site at \$59,026. Of course an experienced solicitor could not be gained for \$59,026. However, for that sum, the District could certainly hire a full-time lawyer, not a part timer for \$195,000. Additionally, some would say that as time goes by, a high paid solicitor begins to represent himself rather than the people and his client is not the public but the Superintendent or the board president. As in the case of WBASD, the goals of the people are not always the goals of management.

A better approach for the district would be to hire 2 lawyers for \$50,000 each and use a contract solicitor for non-standard difficult scenarios where such advice would be worth the premium. Luzerne County where the WBASD exists is known for having an abundance of lawyers so \$50,000 is an attractive salary. In fact it may be excessive. Full time Assistant District Attorneys in the county in recent years were paid \$43,000. It is a good job for a new attorney. Here is an ad for the position:

**Professional  
Assistant District Attorney  
Luzerne County**

**Position: Full Time Assistant  
District Attorney**

**Division/Department: District  
Attorneys Office**

**Employment Status: Full Time**

**Salary: \$43,000**

**Reporting Authority:  
District Attorney**

\$43, 000 is a lot more palatable than \$195,000 plus perqs. Over time, the two new lawyers would be getting smarter and more experienced and would gain allegiance to the district. Perhaps at some point, the two lawyers could be reduced to one lawyer with the other lawyer hired as a contractor for short periods. Ray Wendeloski at \$195,000 is not a god and is easily replaceable unless he is valuable because of special things he may know—**such as *where the skeletons are buried.***

4. Auditor General, State of Pennsylvania, Eugene DePasquale

The Save Our Schools (SOS) group as a group of over 2,000, members and as individuals has written to all state officials including the governor and the Attorney General and the Auditor General. Besides the acrid land on the site itself, many people believe the entire Big Toxic School project as sponsored by the board has a certain corrupt smell to it. SOS does not have the funds to conduct the necessary investigation and so the Aus Gen's visit to the district recently was looked upon as a very big deal. It turned out to be politics as usual.

For many who wrote and others who saw or heard about the letters written to state officials, one of the big hopes for resolution was the fact that the letters prompted the Auditor General to come on site to find out what was going on in Wilkes-Barre Area.

The people of WBA were encouraged and were sure that the Aud Gen would find incriminating evidence that despite the potential for sickness and other bad results from putting students in a toxic school, there had to be an overwhelming criminal rationale for the board going ahead with this project against the major concerns of the people. Maybe so! Maybe not! But, it sure seems very likely!

Unfortunately, it did not happen. Even after the Aud Gen bragged about how instrumental he was personally in Scranton regarding the Scranton School District, about twenty miles north of WBASD, it appeared to many that he was energized and would be coming after the WBA board and management with enhanced vigor. Here is the report on the Aud Gen's braggadocio in Scranton just about 2 years ago. You can see why WBA expectations for a better report were high.

HARRISBURG (Sept. 18, 2018) Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today issued the following statement about the first-degree felony charges filed today against the former Scranton School District fleet manager:

I launched an audit of the Scranton School District in 2016, and the excellent work of my audit team uncovered potential criminal acts and misuse of public funds. I turned over all

evidence to authorities, sparking an investigation that led to today's charges which is how the process is supposed to work.

The path of this case shows exactly how my audits can make a difference in protecting students and taxpayer dollars.

It's clear the corruption we discovered affected student education by taking at least \$1 million in taxpayer funds out of the classroom and causing teacher furloughs.

Bluntly stated, this district is in one hell of a financial mess. When I released my audit and said the school officials needed to get their heads out of their asses, some board members didn't like my tone. For the sake of the students, let's hope my tone is not their biggest concern today.

One particular director, Bob Lesh, even said the audit could only be used as toilet paper. I'd love to know what he thinks of it now.

Simply put, district officials must be more accountable moving forward as they repair the damage done.

Today's criminal charges should mark a turning point for Scranton School District students, staff and administration. Its time the adults in the district refocus on their primary purpose: educating students.

But when he came to judge the criminal antics in Wilkes-Barre Area, DePasquale failed miserably. We in WBA are not sure what happened to the Aud Gen but he began to act like somebody had gotten to him. He failed WBA miserably.

Yes, Aud Gen De Pasquale acted in WBA like a man who recently had his family threatened or who got a better offer than the WB public could deliver. It was very disheartening. Later the citizens found that this same Aud Gen—no friend of WBA citizens—had been deemed ethically compromised by the NRCC.

Ethically compromised? And WBA had to rely on his integrity and honesty. Ethically compromised???



WBA citizens and SOS had already seen his ineptness in action so we were not surprised when DePasquale was hit with an ethics rap. Why you may ask about the NRCCs statement. Here is what he did wrong in that instance: The PA Aud Gen took \$11,200 in donations from Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf and his wife, while he was supposed to be auditing Wolf's actions related to the coronavirus pandemic. The entire SOS budget could not come up with \$11,200 so we obviously did not have DePasquale's attention. Ethically compromised? How long does such an anti-public illness last?

The word on DePasquale was out but it was too late for WBA unless the new Aud Gen Scott Perry decides to dig up some fresh dirt from Little Chernobyl. Perry beat Democrat Eugene DePasquale, Pennsylvania's term-limited auditor general in the closely watched race for the central Pennsylvania-based congressional district. This includes Harrisburg, Carlisle and York with their accompanying suburbs, as well as rural areas. DePasquale could not get elected Dog Catcher in NEPA.

## Is DePasquale ethically compromised

A puzzlement that even the Cat in the Hat could not solve was How could the PA Auditor General have complimented the Wilkes-Barre Area School Board on their fumbling and financial failings in the ramming of the Big Toxic School down the public's throat? Then the answer:

*He was ethically compromised.*

I guess we'll have to look at the family tree or the crony tree to find out if Wilkes-Barre Area has legs in Harrisburg.

On May 20, 2020 after much hope by taxpayers in Wilkes-Barre Area who had hoped that the Auditor General (Aud Gen) would find where the WBASB criminal loot is buried, the completed report from Aud Gen Eugene DePasquale was very disappointing.

Specifically the Aud Gen reviewed the District's Consolidation Plan. The Aud Gen should be ashamed of his work in Wilkes-Barre Area.

Here is the full news report of the review as released by the Aud Gen:

HARRISBURG (May 20, 2020) Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today said his review of Wilkes-Barre Area School Districts high school consolidation plan reveals tough decisions have been made to generate cost savings with the intent to set a solid fiscal foundation for the future.

Based on the limited scope of review, my team found the Wilkes-Barre Area School District is working to create a safe learning environment for students, faculty and staff, DePasquale said.

I do not envy the elected school board leaders who made some very tough decisions despite opposition from a group of residents to do what they believe is in the best interests of the district and its students with a plan that is building some financial stability, he said.

I also applaud the citizens who brought their concerns to our attention, DePasquale said. Any time a school building closes, in this case three high school buildings, there is an emotional impact and public concerns should be evaluated.

After receiving nearly 100 complaints from 33 residents, DePasquale directed his team to review scores of community concerns related to the Luzerne County district's plan to consolidate students from three deteriorating high schools into a single, new building.

The Department of the Auditor Generals next regularly scheduled audit of the district is expected to begin in late 2021.

Meanwhile, the following observations are based on the interim review begun in August 2019:

District officials worked with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and, since 2002, conducted three feasibility studies

which pointed to the increasingly dire condition of the district's aging buildings.

Before the consolidation and construction project started, the district worked with financial adviser PFM to conduct a financial assessment which concluded it would cost \$230 million to upgrade all existing buildings. The district's construction and consolidation plan for the high school is estimated to cost \$123 million.

PFM also projected in 2014 that without drastic cuts, the district would be facing a \$36 million deficit in the 2018-19 school year. However, the district reduced spending by eliminating dozens of employees and curtailing some programs, resulting in the district ending the 2018-19 school year with a positive fund balance of more than \$5 million.

Savings from district actions also helped establish a \$7 million capital reserve fund in 2018-19 for ongoing building repairs and renovations. The district also created a 20-year facility maintenance master plan.

An initial plan that was projected to save money by consolidating students from two high schools into one building at the site of the Coughlin High School was denied approval by the zoning board. Preparing to present a plan to the zoning board required the district to invest approximately \$2.5 million in design and construction plans which were adapted for use in the new high school currently under construction. Another \$2.5 million was spent on asbestos remediation of the Coughlin High School that was necessary regardless of the district's future plans.

Following the zoning boards rejection, the district purchased a 77-acre former mining site, including mineral rights, for \$4.25 million based on district-obtained comparable sale prices in the region.

A \$123 million, 40-year bond was obtained for the land purchase and construction of the new high school.

The district's long-term financial plan includes projected savings of more than \$3 million from the high school consolidation.

The district worked with the state Department of Environmental Protection to complete land reclamation and site work required to build on a former mining site.

It is good to see that Wilkes-Barre Area School District officials have developed a long-term financial plan, DePasquale said. Future boards will need to maintain the same level of fiscal discipline.

Learn more about the Department of the Auditor General online at [www.PaAuditor.gov](http://www.PaAuditor.gov).

Here are some questions that residents have about the good faith of the Auditor general's review and report

1. Based on the limited scope of review, why was the review limited when there were 100 complaints and 33 people who had filed such complaints.
2. The district worked with financial adviser PFM. The district ignored the recommendation of the PFM study. Why was this not investigated?
3. The district would be facing a \$36 million deficit in the 2018-19 school year. When the current Superintendent was promoted after the Jeff Namey period, the district had a balance of \$20,000,000. What happened to that?
4. There has never been a maintenance plan on any of the buildings. That is why neglect is the operative word for the level of maintenance care received.
5. A \$123 million, 40-year bond was obtained for the land purchase and construction of the new high school. The cost including bussing and interest is known to be closer to a half billion.

6. Projected savings of more than \$3 million from the high school consolidation. This is bogus. The district is about to bankrupt the taxpayers to pay for this corrupt folly.

7. Following the zoning board's rejection, the district purchased a 77-acre former mining site, including mineral rights, for \$4.25 million based on district-obtained comparable sale prices in the region.. The fact is the district wasted millions of dollars on pieces of the project about which it had no liability.

### **Observations and conclusions:**

The Wilkes-Barre Area residents have been sandbagged by a biased review and report by the Attorney General Eugene DePasquale. The NRCC have recently noted that Aud Gen DePasquale is ethically compromised. The WBA public has no reason to accept the findings of this supposed review - from an official whose integrity is compromised. NRCC

<https://www.nrcc.org/2020/09/10/eugene-depasquale-is-ethically-compromised>

We wonder what proceeds came DePasquales way to have him compromise his investigation of the Big Toxic school. He is a compromised man.

Was it ethical to ignore very questionable board actions and even praise a district that lost \$6 million by not waiting for zoning approval; spending over a million to improve land not owned by the taxpayers; to purchase un-reclaimed land; to buy a dump and pay 5 times the assessed value, in violation of the board's official action that stated to purchase at the appraised value? What would the Aud Gen say? So far he has not spoken to those who filed the 100 complaints about the consolidation project.

Sandbagged Again????!



## Death By Sandbag

### 5. Attorney General, State of Pennsylvania, Josh Shapiro

Wilkes-Barre and Scranton at one time could have been called the Twin Crime Cities. As many know when there was a crime commission that wanted to nab the bad guys to protect the good guys, over a decade ago, federal prosecutors snagged 30 people as part of investigations into corruption. The investigation into the C-word (corruption) focused heavily on the three largest Luzerne County governments — the county, Wilkes-Barre and Wilkes-Barre Area School District. No folks, that is not a mis-spelling.

So, where has the Attorney General been with all the complaints from residents of this area being filed in Harrisburg. Scranton has gotten nailed but not Wilkes-Barre? Tell me why? The Big Toxic School at Little Chernobyl is far more egregious than anything that went on in Scranton.

If Josh Shapiro is re-elected, will he feel emboldened enough to investigate and prosecute wrongdoing in WBASD or will he thank those who got him elected? What can we expect from Heather Heidelbaugh if after all the ballot stoking she gains the Atty General spot. It certainly can't be worse than what WBA got from Harrisburg in the recent past.

Our area unfortunately has the distinct odor of corruption. Only a politician's olfactory perception can miss it .When will we address it to the people's satisfaction? Hopefully soon!

Amen for now! See you all in Volume II





## Chapter 21 The Rest of the story is in Volume II

### A Chronicle of Inept Public-School Governing & Corrective Actions

By now, you must be asking yourself with a board suffering from a combination of incompetence and intransigence, what are the qualifications that one must possess to be elected to such a board?

Well, you may not expect this to be the answer but it is, nonetheless. There are no qualifications to be on a public school board and no compensation. Some might suggest that the boards we get are worth every penny of what we pay. In all fairness to dedicated board members, and there are some, the time commitment is substantial, the magnitude of responsibility overwhelming. Criticism abundant.

This led Dr. Richard Holodick, well degreed and well qualified to speak to the issue to ask this question:

The operative question is:

***“Is there a better way to govern our public-school districts?”***

We see unethical behavior, nepotism & cronyism, aka fraud. It all amounts to **Bad Education**.

In volume II, led by author Dr. Richard Holodick get ready for

Governance Public Schools,  
By  
Richard A. Holodick, Ph.D.  
Brian W. Kelly, M.B.A

## School Boards, Directors, and Trustees

As required by the Pennsylvania School Code, public school districts are governed by a School Board that is comprised of directors / trustees who serve specific terms. In compliance with state and federal laws, school boards establish policies and regulations by which their schools are governed.

The daily operation of a school district from small, medium to large-sized district can be compared to the operation of a business. For this publication, we focused on the Wilkes Barre Area School District. A school district that encompasses 124 square miles, the city, and surrounding communities.

In this district, sixty-seven thousand residents are at the poverty level. The student population is just under seven thousand students. The employee count full and part-time is nearly 1000. There are nine facilities, district contracts out the bussing of students. The district's operating budget exceeds \$121 million dollars, which by state reg Code 609 must not be overspent.

What this paragraph establishes is that the Wilkes-Barre Area School District is not a small business. It is a large business. The traditional superintendent (CEO) graduates from high school, enters college, earning a teacher's degree, and teaches. He/she forwards his/her education earning a master's and doctorate degree with accompanying the "Letter of Eligibility" certification to hold a superintendent's position.

The missing component is compared to private sector experience requiring that a CEO had to spend time running a business or at least working in the private sector. This is a serious concern as the superintendent is responsible for running a very large business.

The real-world experience shortfall can be taken care of by the election of board members with real-world experience and dedication to meeting the mission of a public school, to "Educate and Inspire." Looking at our subject matter, the WBA school board, it appears to be the textbook board. There are four retired WBA administrators with master's degrees, a minister, who is African American, and a

handicapped grandparent, a graduate of the district. Why then is it not working?

How about the fact that the board has no policies/ procedures for their operation. An example would be Roberts Rules of Order. No such thing in WBA. Nepotism and cronyism prevail and are actually accepted. This is coupled with the employment, promotion, contracting with the inexperienced.

No one in this case is held responsible for anything important except the un-connected...all three of them. Accountability for internal and external contracted services is zero. The district is in dire straits with students ranked at the bottom statewide in academics,.

A PFM study predicted a \$70 million-dollar deficit, and 8 of the nine facilities are old and need of replacement or renovations. The price tag to make the district whole was estimated at a HALF BILLION dollars. The board has begun this massive costly project without a curriculum or a facility long-range master plan. In this volume coming up folks, we describe what the fallout has been and a protocol of what needs to take place moving forward to create a smooth operating machine. See you in the next book!



## Other Books by Brian W. Kelly: (amazon.com, and Kindle)

**COVID-19 Mask, Yes? Or No? It's Everybody's Recommended Solution!!!**

**LSU Tigers Championship Seasons** Starts at beginning of LSU Football to the National Championship

**Great Coaches in LSU Football** Book starts with the first LSU coach; goes to Orgeron Championship

**Great Players in LSU Football** Begins with 1893 QB Ruffin G Pleasant to 2019 QB Burrow

**America for Millennials!** A growing # of disintegrationists want to tear US down

**Great Moments in LSU Football** Book starts at start of Football to the Ed Orgeron Championship.

**The Constitution's Role in a Return to Normalcy** Can the Constitution Survive?

**The Constitution vs. The Virus** Simultaneous attack coronavirus and US governors

**One, Two, Three, Pooph!!! Reopen Country Now!** Return to normalcy is just around the corner.

**Reopen America Now** Return to Normalcy

**Enough is Enough!** Re Re: Covid, We are not children. We're adults. We'll make the right decisions.

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