

Statement to the Board and Administrators of Pittsburgh Public Schools

From Mark Rauterkus, city council candidate, district 3, special election on March 14, 2006;
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parent students who attend PPS (2nd & 4th graders)
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Feb 13, 2006

Schools need to be woven into the fabric of our communities. Likewise, school planning and communicating must be woven into community.

The “Smoky City Image” sticks to Pittsburgh because smoke still swirls around as deals get hatched behind the scenes.

The new Right Sized Plan is pretty good. It has been pretty good at keeping others at bay. It has been pretty good generating smoke. The Right Sized plan has been pretty good at taking a pretty good district into the future where we'll be pretty darn good.

Pretty good isn't good enough when smoke fills the landscape. Pretty good isn't good enough when our most precious, our kids, face large impacts.

The parent hot line is pretty good. I wanted a robust, open-source, time-saving, interactive communication infrastructure. I suggested this at the November hearing.

Mr. Roosevelt marveled about Pittsburgh's rumor mill. Starve that problem – and don't feed it. Pull the plug on pretty good and make excellence the standard. Justifications and reasonings are necessary. An open defense is necessary, not negotiations. Adjustments are expected. Put changes and challenges into the open. Then confidence can take root.

I believe that all the king's horses and all the king's men won't be able to fix Pittsburgh. They might be “pretty good.” But, we crave excellence, and that can only happen after we leverage all the people's might and smarts. Organize us **along with** the king's horses and king's men. Then Pittsburgh can soar and the smoke can clear.

We are all connected. We all are teachers. And, we all are students.

The right-sized plan may be missing critical factors:

1. **Pre-school needs and numbers seem to be absent from the Right-Sized Plans.** Are you going to kick out the pre-school kids from Roosevelt because they've occupied four classrooms, to make room for Bon Air's students, and in-turn open Bon Air for Pre-School?

2. **What about the failing Duquesne School System?** The region is too small to turn a blind eye to any pocket of despair. We can't ignore. We need everyone's talents to thrive. Let's absorb Duquesne.

3. **Burgwin in Hazelwood seems necessary.** The Hazelwood site is never going to come back as a thriving, riverfront community if we don't have a school. Regionally, we need Hazelwood to function. With Burgwin closed, the past closure of Gladstone (middle and HS), Duquesne's proximity, the idle land on the site, it doesn't add up to me.

4. **South Vo Tech should remain under the ownership of the PPS district.** I'm a free market guy, through and through. But there are some public assets that we should not sell off.

The principal at Schenley HS mentioned a possibility of moving students to South for a year while Schenley's rehab occurred. The flexibility of the facility for South for the future is needed – should new urban high-rise flats be built five blocks away on the east side of Station Square. If we put 4,000 to 5,000 new residents along the rivers just four blocks away, we'll need a school there. Don't sell South now.

5. Closing **Knoxville** is a devastating blow to that hilltop community. Perhaps a **second middle school for creative and performing arts** could fit there. Everyone wants Rodgers to move to their neighborhood, let's repeat the success.

6. **When is a K-8 school not a K-8 school?** As a parent, if my kids are all in K-8 grades, and they go to a K-8 school, they need to be in the same school. The research for the K-8 model won't hold true if the model isn't K-8. Call two schools with one principal two schools with one principal, not a K-8 school.

7. Thanks for **thinking again** about Schenley. Join the WPIAL. Organize school newspapers, district wide. Insist student governments operate in all schools. And, may I join the High School task force, because there is more work to be done.