Focus on A Downsizing District February 2013 Vol. 20. No. 4

Theme articles

40 years ago, Germantown-King pairing marred by neighborhood rivalries

by Benjamin Herold, video by Kimberly Paynter

A matter of expectations?

The "paired school" model at King and Germantown lingered for a couple of years, but it never really recovered.

Now, concern about possible conflicts between those same neighborhoods is one big reason many in Northwest Philadelphia oppose the district's plan to close Germantown and send hundreds of students to King.

Mayor Michael Nutter said that he thinks it's time for Philadelphia to get over its parochial rivalries and face the future.

"I'm not willing to throw my hands up and say, 'This is the way it's been, so this is the way it always has to be,'" Nutter said. "That is having low expectations."

The history between school communities like those at Germantown and King runs deep, however.

It wasn't just neighborhood violence and students' desire for a stable four-year high school experience that doomed the "paired school" experiment. Many faculty members at the schools resented the system, which limited some of their professional opportunities.

And many parents in the middle-class Northwest Philly neighborhoods around King, such as West Oak Lane and East Mount Airy, began fighting almost immediately to separate from Germantown, which was surrounded by poorer neighborhoods.

"It looks like the more affluent blacks are beginning to develop some of the hang-ups that the other ethnic groups have had all along," Walter Scriven, Germantown's principal at the time, told the Philadelphia Inquirer in 1974.

Memories and lessons

Despite it all, many members of the schools' Class of '75 thrived.

Al Banks is now an audio engineer at WHYY-FM in Philadelphia.

Debbie Cunningham Alexander just retired from Citibank. She still lives in Germantown. She sings in three different choirs — a passion that was cultivated in high school.

And Kenneth Greene Sr. is now a lieutenant in the Philadelphia Fire Department.

Although he remembers the gang wars, Greene lights up talking about the football team. And Mr. Scriven. And being blown away while reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. And, of course, Cheryl Downing from Brickyard.

The pair ended up marrying and having three children.

"The school was the transitioning point for my life," said Greene.

As for Elisha Morris, he's now the student internship coordinator at Cheyney University. He also runs a youth ministry at the Mount Airy Church of God in Christ, less than a mile from King High.

"By the time we graduated, I think we saw the world as a place we needed to give to, not take from," he said.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Theme articles

Charters loom large in school-closing debate by Paul Jablow

6 turnarounds planned for fall

Playing with fire by Benjamin Herold for NewsWorks, a Notebook news Partner

Closure savings are labor savings by Bill Hangley, Jr.

The transition: More promises than plans by Bill Hangley, Jr.

Where displaced teachers will land is uncertain by Connie Langland

Timeline: Closings and controversy

Quicktakes: What are your hopes and fears about the closings process? Interviews and photos by Kofi Biney

40 years ago, Germantown-King pairing marred by neighborhood rivalries by Benjamin Herold, video by Kimberly Paynter

A closer look: 44 schools to be closed or relocated

In our opinion

Change the dynamic

Budget: Red alert

Eye on special education

District says services will follow students, but parents must be proactive to make sure by Sonja Kerr

News in brief

Hite says transportation solutions will come after final closings list by Charlotte Pope

First round of Keystone Exams: Much concern among teachers by Charlotte Pope

Activism around the city

YUC makes six demands for healthier school lunches by Kofi Biney

A new state budget proposal, another fight for education aid Wendy Harris

From our readers

Tests should encourage

Notebook news

Teaching, writing, and spreading the word by Kofi Biney

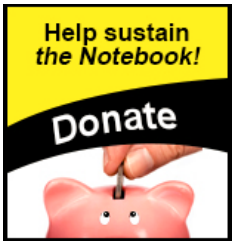
Making moves in 2013 by Wendy Harris

School snapshot

Students at Hill-Freedman participate in event promoting STEM

Other news & features

Mass school closings: Why the numbers don't add up by Helen Gym



LOGIN / REGISTER

Username:*

Password:*

Log in using OpenID Log in

Join our community of users

Request new password

Click Here

Like Greene and Cunningham Alexander, Morris is involved in the current effort to save Germantown from closing.

He looks back with mixed feelings on the School District's experiment at Germantown and King 40 years ago.

The reality, says Morris, is that no one — not students, not school staff, not parents — was fully on board back then with the reasons behind the experiment. Because of that weak foundation, he said, the "paired school" model couldn't withstand the trouble that arose.

That's a lesson Morris hopes the school sytem will consider before trying to merge Germantown and King again.

"I think what we tried to do was noble," he said. "We just didn't do enough of the groundwork."

This story was produced as part of a partnership in covering the Philadelphia schools between WHYY/NewsWorks *and the* Philadelphia Public School Notebook.

Notebook contributing editor Dale Mezzacappa contributed reporting to this article. Lois Zinn contributed transcription services to this project. Special thanks to the Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries.

Photo credit: On Feb, 8, 1972, students arrived for the first day of classes at the new Martin Luther King High School.
Credit: Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, PA. Ligato (Philadelphia Bulletin.)

« FIRST ‹ PREVIOUS 1 2

TWEET COMMENTS (5) PRINT

February , February , March , 2013 , Theme articles , Web Exclusive

Comments (5)

Submitted by Annoy (not verified) on Fri, 02/01/2013 - 08:32.

B. Herold tweeted - "Still blown away by this: 6300 #phillyeducation HS students live in attendance zones of King & G'town. 5,000 go to charters, magnets, etc." I don't know why this is shocking. The Northwest area includes wealthier neighborhoods - Mt. Airy, Chestnut Hill - and plenty of private schools (Germantown Friends, William Penn Charter/Friends, Shipley, etc.) There has also been a huge charter push at the high school level with a lot of political backers - Imhotep (recruiting athletes seems to be their speciality), West Oak Lane Charter (Dwight Evans ... need I say more), ETC. Then, there is Central and Girls High - certainly a choice for many in Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill. (How many from Mt. Airy / Chestnut Hill are at Masterman?) Saul and Roxborough are also in the Northwest. So, I'm not surprised at all. There are many options for other than Germantown and King.

REPLY

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Sat, 02/02/2013 - 04:22.

Interesting article.

The "Paired School" idea pretty much sums up how the PSD has been running schools into the ground with mismanagement and stupidity over the last 40 years. What sort of idiot through that kids should have to move halfway through highschool to help make some social engineer feel good about himself.

So, it was deemed perfectly reasonable to force two schools together when integration and social equity were the goals. No howls of protest from the teacher unions or other establishment groups then.

But when you talk about a bankrupt school district trying to close a 30% utilized 100 year old facility and consolidate it with another underutilized facility, now many of these same forces are up in arms. The irony is maybe these two schools wouldn't be so underutilized if the idiot social planners hadn't tried (and failed) in playing God back in the 70s.

REPLY

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Sun, 02/03/2013 - 06:39.

I wonder what might happen if members of both neighborhoods focused on how the negative mentalities and behaviors associated with neighborhood rivalries have destroyed these schools...not the district's planning. Misplaced anger? Destruction from WITHIN is the TOLERATED culprit. Why are the adults sanctioning the rival mentality of their children and grandchildren? Leaving a legacy of that's-just-how-it-is? Why is it ok to give in to the status quo of ignorance? However, appropriate planning is absolutely necessary. Makes no sense to run an underutilized building. Include in planning how to RETAIN students. They ARE leaving for a reason. If not, another cs will crop up to replace GHS & we'll be right back where we started. So much to consider.

Quotes from the front lines

Cartoon

February edition cartoon

En español

Transición de escuelas del cierre no está clara por Bill Hangley Jr.

Incierto dónde terminarán los maestros desplazados por Connie Langland

SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

your email here

Subscribe

PHILLY ED FEED

Tweets from @PSNotebook/philly-ed-feed

Most Popular TODAY ALL TIME

Hite discusses Philly schools blueprint on radio show

U.S. math and reading achievement edges up, but gaps remain

Notes from the news, Nov. 11

Escuelas están fijándose más en las ausencias sin permiso

Amid signs of cover-up, Hite orders new probe into alleged cheating at Wagner

URBAN SCHOOL NEWS
Stories From Other Cities

NEWS: Remainders: What to do when you don't like your kid's teacher

In northeast Colorado, a collaborative response to new standards - All Together Now

NEWS: Report that city sought finds room for improvement in networks

Voices: I left teaching, and I am not ashamed - lessons learned

NEWS: Coalition wants the state to let more schools skip the Regents

more

Philadelphia Education Fund 2013 EDDY AWARDS
Celebrating the champions of education
November 19, 2013
5:30 pm - 8:30 pm
at WHYY

Richardson Dilworth Award
for Distinguished Public Service

Universal Family of Schools
Now Hiring Educators

northern children's services
Personal Responsibility Education Program
215-482-1423

LOOKING FOR A NEW JOB?
Get schooled on Philly public education jobs!
Hiring? Email shawnp@thenotebook.org to place your job posting
Introducing
JOBS.THENOTEBOOK.ORG

advertise HERE!
GET YOUR MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE
thenotebook

REPLY

Submitted by Cheryl Johnson (not verified) on Mon, 02/11/2013 - 09:20.

I am a graduate from King Germantown, class of 76. While attending King Germantown I did notice some fiction with students. Within different neighborhoods.In fact I was part of making MLK a four year school. I was part of the protest. As a female the transition was fine. There were more gang wars back then, where as today there are drug dealers wars.

As parents we should focus on the parents, teaching their children how to accept different people life styles. Meaning school is for your future, their education, not a social event. This is life, there will always be people you might not like, or personaliaties clash.. These children want to be grown, will grow up and knock that chip off your shoulder and get along with different communities. Go to school for YOUR future!

REPLY

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Thu, 04/18/2013 - 23:53.

As someone who grew up in the northwest back in the 70s and 80s, I remember the idea of attending King or Germantown was used as motivation to perform well in elementary and middle school. I never understood the idea of a mixed income local school. My parents made a lot of money and probably wouldn't have allowed us to attend either school anyway. What has happened is that parents in Chestnut Hill, East and West Mount Airy just send their kids to Chestnut Hill Academy/Springside, Germantown Friends, Crefeld etc. and I do not blame them. I think that original decision helped lead to massive"White Flight" during my childhood as I saw the neighborhood get darker and darker as I grew up. Mount Airy in recent years is becoming less segregated and this school decision may just reverse that. If i live on Woodbrook Lane, Allens Lane or Gorgas Lane, Why should my kid be forced to attend M.L.K. with kids who live in Brickyard, Haines Street etc.

REPLY

Post new comment

Your name:

Anonymous

E-mail:

The content of this field is kept private and will not be shown publicly.

Homepage:

Comment:*

Input format

Notify me when new comments are posted

All comments Replies to my comment

Save Preview

By using this service you agree not to post material that is obscene, harassing, defamatory, or otherwise objectionable. We reserve the right to delete or remove any material deemed to be in violation of this rule, and to ban anyone who violates this rule. Please see our "Terms of Usage" for more detail concerning your obligations as a user of this service. Reader comments are limited to 500 words. You are fully responsible for the content that you post.