

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD HEARING MINUTES
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
December 15, 2010

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on December 15, 2010, in the Harry M. Dengler, Jr. Performing Arts Center at Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Ritchie Webb, President
Mr. Scott Congdon
Mrs. Susan Cummings
Mr. Mike Morris
Mr. William D. O'Connor
Mr. William Oettinger

ADMINISTRATORS:

Dr. Louis T. Muenker
Mrs. Patricia Boylan
Dr. Geeta Heble
Mr. Kevin Kane

BOARD MEMBER ABSENT:

Mr. Kim Koutsouradis, Vice President
Mr. Richard M. Eccles
Ms. Irene M. Boyle

OTHERS: Approximately 100 persons from the public, staff and press

SECRETARY: Mrs. Jennifer Burns

SOLICITOR: Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

Mr. Webb announced that prior to the meeting an Executive Session was held.

Call to Order

Mr. Webb called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Webb requested those in attendance join in the salute to the flag.

Mr. Webb turned the meeting over to the District Solicitor to conduct the hearing.

Mr. Profy stated that the reason for tonight's hearing is for the sole purpose of considering the application of the School Lane Charter School Neshaminy. He said that it would be performed in a hearing format. Mr. Profy noted that according to Act 22, the Charter School Law creates a deadline of November 15, to submit an application for the following academic year, being the 2011 – 2012 school year. He also stated that there is a 45 day window after the filing of the application for the Board of School Directors to hold at least one public hearing, which is well within that 45 day window. Mr. Profy noted that the next window starts from the conclusion of tonight's hearing and it expands from a minimum of 45 days to a maximum of 75 days for the Board of School Directors to grant or deny the application. He said that the criteria which the Board is to consider is spelled out in Act 22. Mr. Profy then introduced Karen A. Schade, CEO and President of School Lane Charter School in Bensalem.

Presentation of School Lane Charter School Application

Karen A. Schade, CEO and President of School Lane Charter School in Bensalem gave a presentation on the following: (See Attachment A) Ms. Schade stated that the purpose is to establish a K-12 public charter school in the Neshaminy School District to provide public school choice. She noted that the charter school would serve approximately 850 students. She mentioned that Neshaminy students would have first priority of the 850 seats and then after that any other school district would be eligible. Ms. Schade also said that it would be developed utilizing the model that is successful in the School Lane Charter School, Bensalem.

Mr. Webb stated that the public comment must be regarding the School Lane Charter School only.

Public Comment

Mark Shubin, parent of kindergarten student in Neshaminy, voiced his support for the charter school and mentioned that he believes it is an urgent matter for the community to approve charter schools. Mr. Shubin said that school choice builds competition in the community for excellence in education. He stated that charter schools break the public school monopoly, creates smaller class sizes, new teaching methods, and the accountability from not only teachers but also students and parents. Mr. Shubin stated that the competition will bring on change to push Neshaminy to improve its technological capabilities and curriculum. Mr. Shubin stated that language arts are an important part of any school curriculum, particularly early Chinese, as this will be a valuable asset in the future.

Lisa Cook, Langhorne, parent of two Neshaminy students, school nurse for School Lane Charter School, declared her support for the emerging School Lane Charter School in Neshaminy. As an employee of School Lane Charter School in Bensalem in the capacity of school nurse, Ms. Cook has had the opportunity to see the positive influence of a charter school on the students. Ms. Cook stated that one of the impressive things about School Lane is that no student goes unnoticed. Ms. Cook asked the School Board to allow Neshaminy families the opportunity to exercise school choice by voting to approve the application for the School Lane Charter School at Neshaminy.

Bethany Gaspari, Langhorne, teacher at School Lane Bensalem, stated that one of the most impressive aspects of the Charter school is that teachers can design a curriculum based on student needs rather than a curriculum that is only set forth by the school. Ms. Gaspari said that all of the teachers in the charter school are certified teachers. She said that it is important to have a choice in the public school system and she implored the Board to approve the application for School Lane Charter School at Neshaminy and the taxpayer's right for public school choice.

Danielle Kerns, Trevoze, two children attending School Lane, stated that her children have been privileged to attend the charter school because the curriculum is unique, children learn Spanish in kindergarten and kindergarten is full day. Ms. Kearns stated that the co-teaching method in charter school gives the students greater access to teachers and less fear and hesitation about the student-teacher contact. She also pointed out that parents are more involved in their children's education because of the excellent communications between teachers and parents. Ms. Kearns asked that the Board approve the application for the charter school in this area.

Ms. Schade added that what is unique about a charter school is that they have to work within a confined budget and cannot raise taxes. She said they have done a good job while staying within the set parameters.

Marv Dickler, retired, Villages of Flowers Mill, inquired if the application for a charter school would automatically give permission to use the Neshaminy Middle School property, or if the application merely gives permission to come into the school district. He further inquired if any determination has been made as to the value of the Neshaminy Middle School property.

Linda Lederer, Langhorne, Neshaminy parent, asked what draws a teacher to teach at a charter school as opposed to other schools. She further inquired if charter school teachers can organize strikes or work slowdowns, such as union teachers can do.

Ms. Schade responded that School Lane Charter Schools are not union, but the teachers do participate in the teacher's retirement fund. She stated that School Lane Charter School teachers make considerably less than other teachers in Lower Bucks County. Ms. Schade stated that some of the reasons teachers come to School Lane Charter School and continue is because of the creative atmosphere and the opportunity to be part of the decision making process.

Jennifer Esposito, Trevoise, parent of Neshaminy preschooler, appealed to the Board to approve the application for the charter school in Neshaminy.

Marie Sorrell, Swan Point, Neshaminy parent, asked for an explanation regarding the funding of the charter school. She also expressed her hope that the Board will approve the application for the School Lane Charter School.

Ms. Schade responded that a percentage of the amount to educate each child is given to the charter school per child, which is calculated from a formula.

Carolyn Philips, Bristol, parent of students in School Lane Charter School Bensalem, said that she is very grateful for the education that her children have received while attending School Lane Charter School in Bensalem. She praised the school for their creativity and positive influence towards education. She urged the Board to approve the application for the benefit of Neshaminy students.

Shirley Francescangeli, Langhorne, voiced her support for the proposed School Lane Charter School Neshaminy, because her children formerly attended a charter school in Philadelphia before moving into the Neshaminy District. Ms. Francescangeli also asked for an explanation of how students are selected to attend the charter school.

Ms. Schade explained that the process is conducted by lottery with Neshaminy students receiving first priority. The second process for filling positions would be by time and date stamp of the application.

Board Comment

Mr. O'Connor asked if there was statistical data on staff turnover.

Ms. Schade replied that she has no official records for the last two years; however, one teacher did leave because she moved and the year prior a few teachers left. She also said that last year a few aides were let go due to budget issues.

Mr. O'Connor inquired how teachers are evaluated.

Ms. Schade stated that each teacher gets two evaluations a year that are based on an observation of performance. She further stated that the evaluation is primarily about teacher growth. Ms. Schade also conducts five minute walk-arounds and she requires the teachers to do two reflective writing pieces per year.

Mr. O'Connor asked Ms. Schade to explain why it has been reported that charter schools are not performing as high as public schools on a statewide basis.

Ms. Schade stated that she is unfamiliar with the report but said to the best of her knowledge School Lane Bensalem is generally on par with Bensalem public schools. She further noted that the idea of charter schools is that they are diverse and offer a different approach to education.

Mr. O'Connor referred to the report provided by Ms. Schade and inquired as to why there was a drop in reading scores in 2009-2010.

Ms. Schade explained that four or five percentage points can be referring to as little as two to three students, because of the small enrollment size of the charter school. Ms. Schade stated that they are continuing to study the situation, advise teachers on improving reading material, and forming new strategies to increase reading levels.

Mr. O'Connor asked if there is any data or studies available as to how students have continued to develop after grade eight when they leave the charter school system.

Ms. Schade stated there is no formal data; however, she has received feedback from parents and students that they are very well prepared for the next phase of their education after charter school.

Mr. Congdon asked what percentage of the School Lane Charter School of Bensalem students are from Philadelphia.

Ms. Shade replied that about 39 percent are from Philadelphia at this time.

Mr. Congdon asked if the 230 students on the waiting list are all from Philadelphia.

Ms. Schade said no, that about 100 students are Bensalem students and about 130 are from other districts, not just Philadelphia.

Mr. Congdon asked if there are situations where there are Philadelphia students in a class and Bensalem students are still on the waiting list.

Ms. Schade replied that this may occur if the out- of- district student is a sibling of another student in the school. She explained that siblings override other applicants.

Mr. Congdon voiced his concern that residents may dislike the fact that out-of-district students may be taken before Neshaminy students.

Ms. Schade said it depends on the number of people within the district that apply to the school.

Mr. Congdon asked what percentage of the student body consists of Special Ed students.

Ms. Schade stated that nine percent of the students are Special Ed and they are in the same classroom as other students.

Mrs. Cummings questioned if there are any comparison charts between the Bensalem Charter School PSSA scores and other schools in the surrounding area.

Ms. Schade said that she does not have existing charts at this time, but she can get some comparisons prepared.

Mrs. Cummings asked how many guidance counselors exist in the Bensalem Charter School.

Ms. Schade replied that the school has one guidance counselor.

Mrs. Cummings inquired if Ms. Schade has visited any charter schools that go up to twelfth grade.

Ms. Schade answered that she has had the opportunity to visit several in the Philadelphia area.

Mr. Oettinger questioned what the process for hiring teachers for a Neshaminy Charter School would be.

Ms. Schade said that the positions are posted on PA REAP, the state site for teaching positions. Applications and resumes are reviewed, interviews are conducted, and then potential candidates are asked to come in and teach a lesson.

Mr. Oettinger asked if any priority is given to resident teachers of Neshaminy.

Ms. Schade replied that the individual's qualifications are more of a consideration than their place of residency.

Mr. Webb asked if the charter school is a non-profit organization.

Ms. Schade replied affirmatively that it is non-profit.

Mr. Webb asked if any excess funds from tax dollars that are not used to educate students would stay within the Neshaminy District, or if the charter school can use the funds for other charter schools in other districts.

Mark Morford, legal counsel, responded that any excess funds would stay within the Neshaminy School District for the education of the students.

Mr. Webb announced that Mr. Dickler's inquiry regarding Neshaminy Middle School could not be addressed in this forum because it is not part of the agenda for this hearing.

Adjournment

Mr. O'Connor moved the meeting be adjourned and Mr. Congdon seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the motion. Mr. Webb adjourned the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Burns
Board Secretary

School Lane Charter School – Neshaminy

Charter Application Hearing
December 15, 2010

Purpose

- Establish a K-12 public charter school in the Neshaminy School District to provide public school choice
- Serve approximately 850 students
- Develop school based upon School Lane Charter School model

About SLCS - Bensalem

- Founded in 1998
- First charter school in Bucks County
- First suburban K-8 charter school in PA
- Currently enrolls 595 students
- Waiting list of 230 students
- 11 years of making AYP

Mission

To create a sanctuary where all members of the community are partners and show by example their commitment to the SLCS vision of high achievement, life-long and active learning, diversity and equity, and collaborative problem solving.

Our Pledge

I am responsible for
the choices I make.

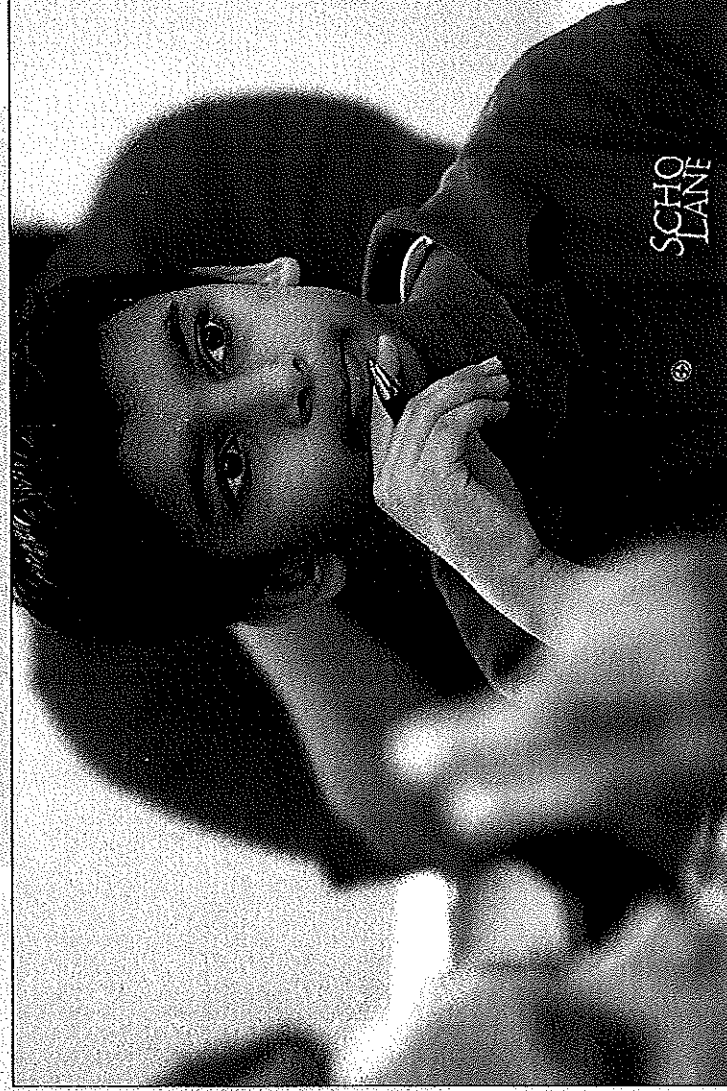
Everything I do and
say affects others.

We work together to be
the best we can be.



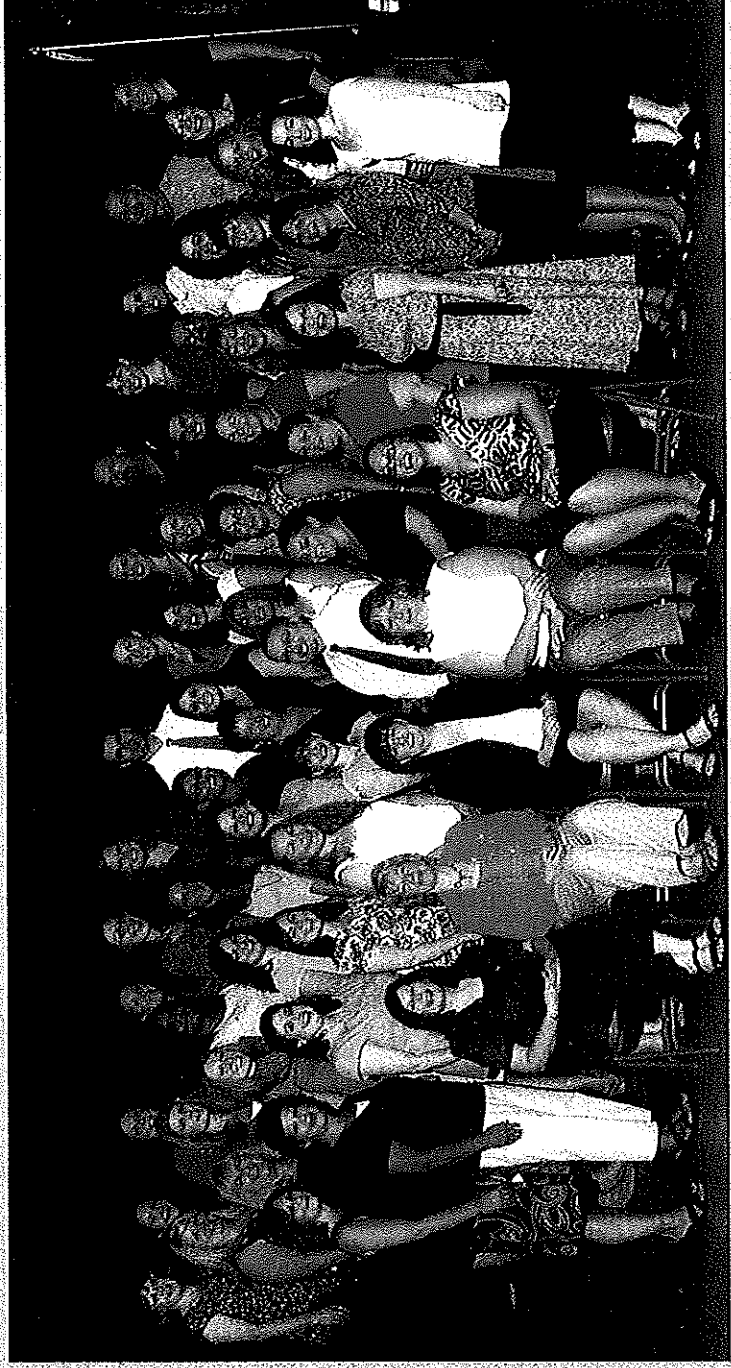
Our Motto

What you achieve
today
is directly related
to what you do.
Believe in yourself and
others will believe in
you!

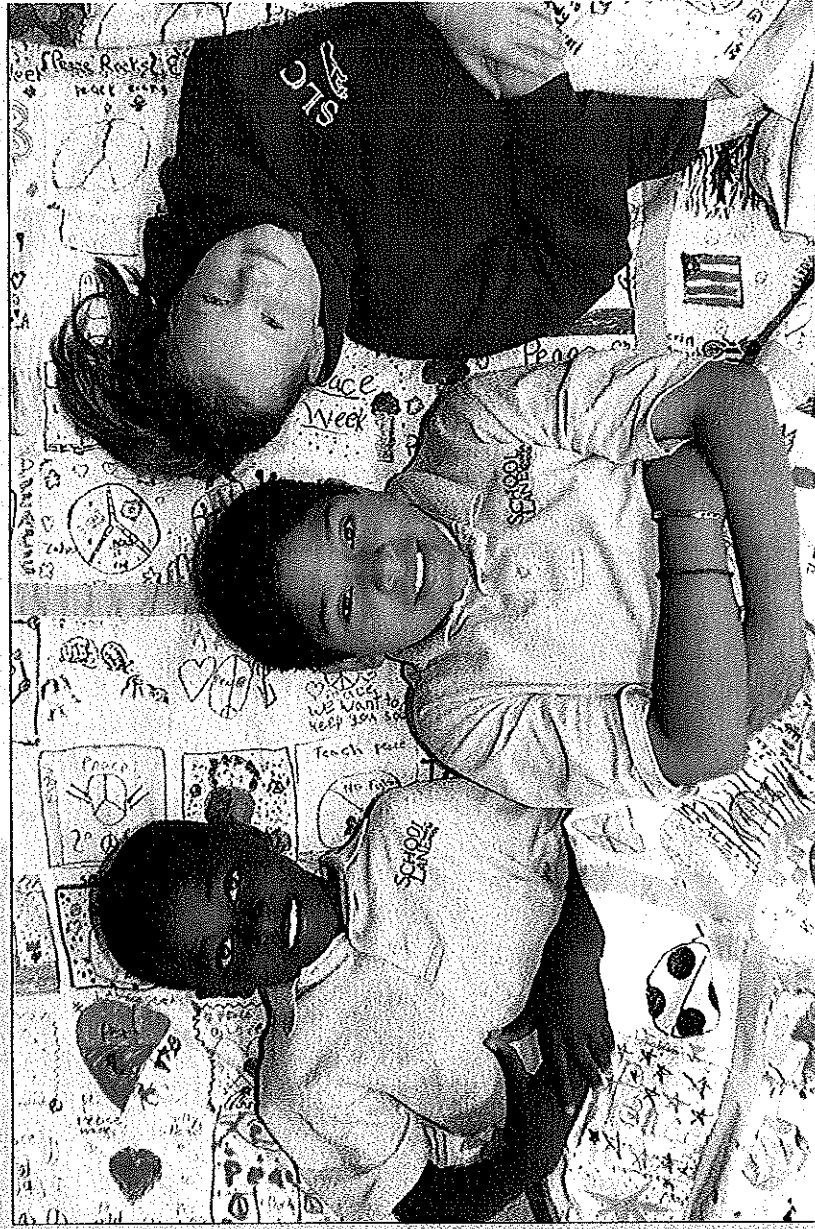


School Lane Charter School provides...

...a highly qualified and caring staff...



...a unified
school of
varied
cultures
working
together
toward
excellence...



...a student to
teacher
ratio of
12 to
1...teachers
loop with
their students
for two
years...



...an inclusion
model featuring
co-teaching for
student support
in Language Arts
and Math every
day...



...curriculum
developed
using
“Backward
Design” and
“Essential
Questions” ...



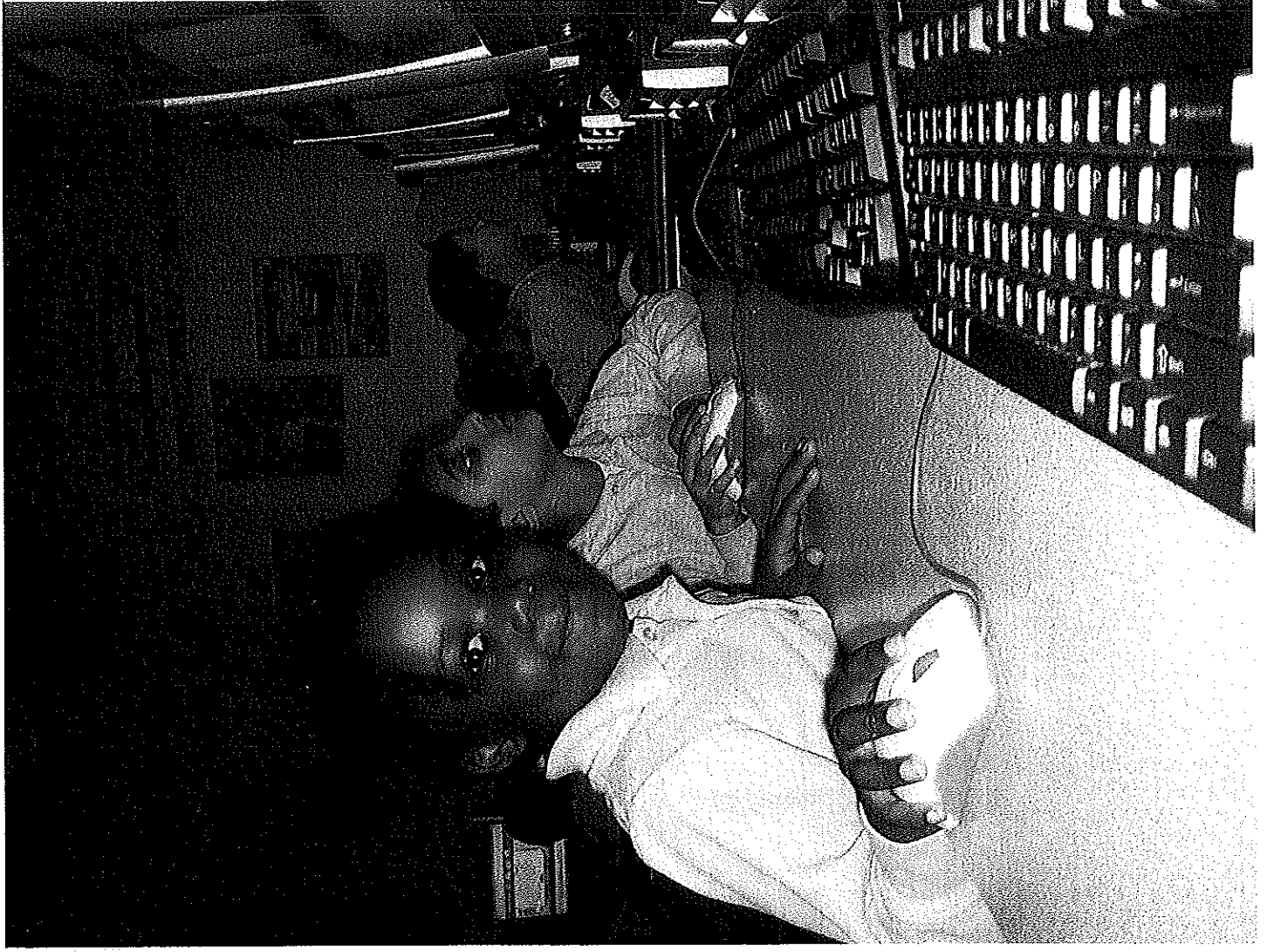
...multi-
subject
exhibitions
to
synthesize
learning
across
subjects...

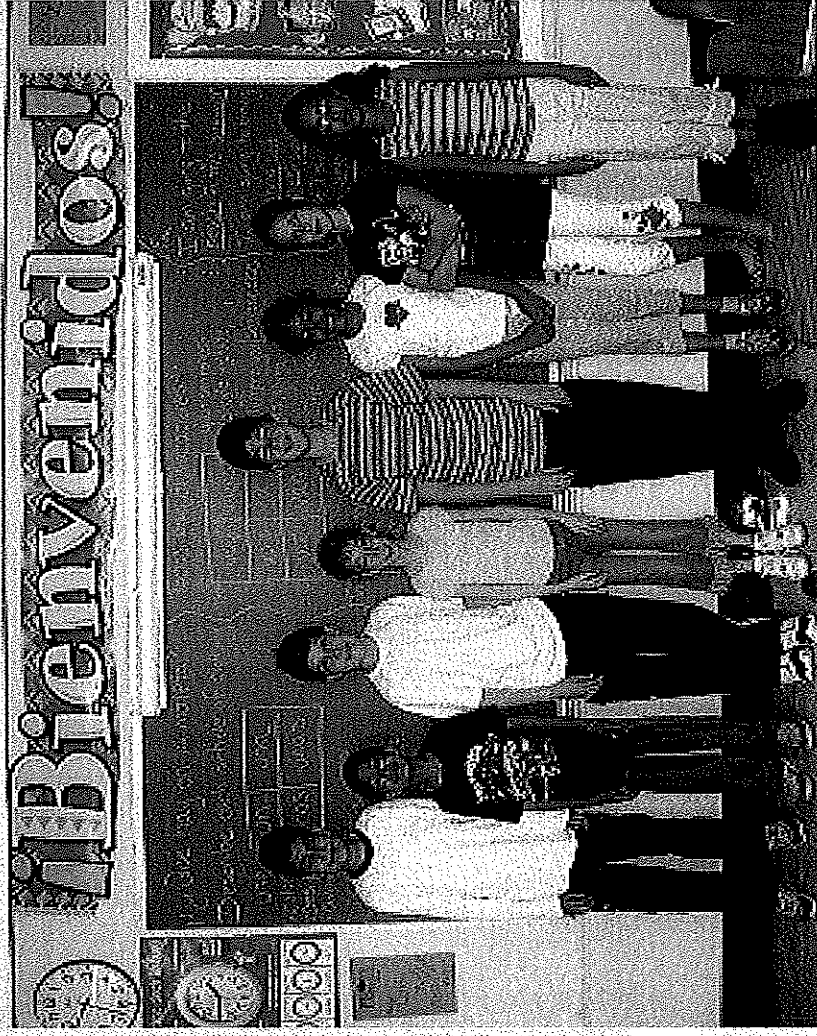


...emphasis on
differentiated
instruction...



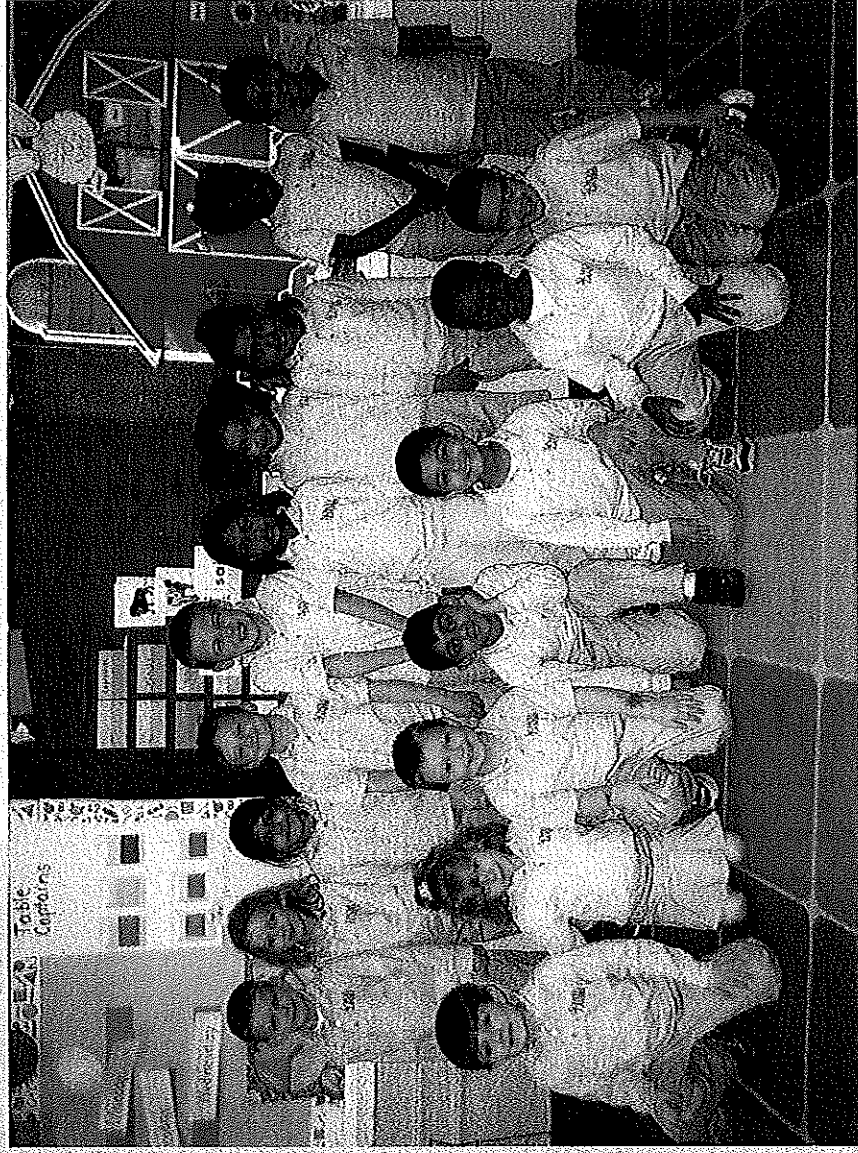
...computer
technology
beginning in
Kindergarten...





.....Introduction to
Spanish beginning
in Kindergarten
and a Middle
School Program
that provides a
Spanish I
equivalency....

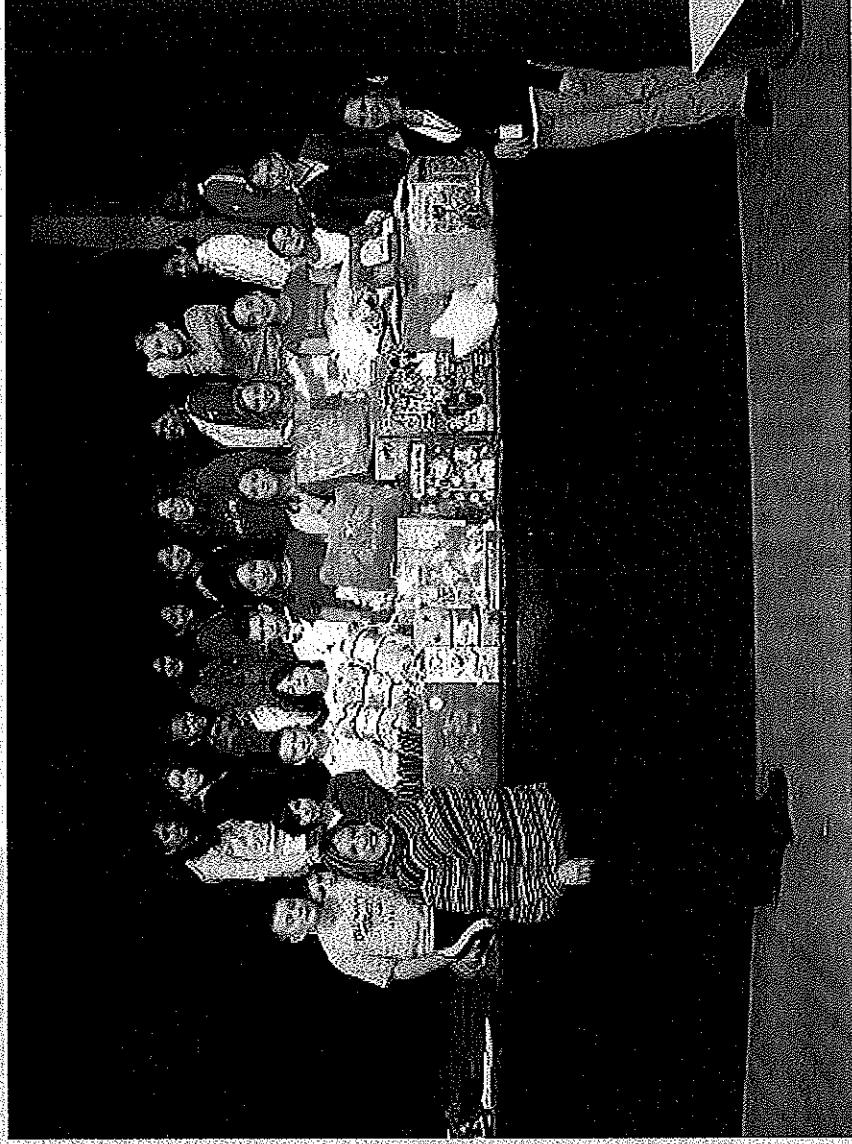
...full-day
Kindergarten...



...an extended
school day and
school year...



...a variety
of extracurricular
activities...



School Lane Charter School Program of Instruction K-5

The educational goal of School Lane Charter School-Neshaminy is to prepare students to be creative, intuitive and analytical thinkers. The interdisciplinary, thematic approach integrates all areas of the curriculum to stress application of knowledge and skills. Our school holds students to rigorous standards of academic and personal achievement and provides support necessary to assist them in fulfilling the full range of their respective intelligences. Multiple assessments encourage students to learn in ways consistent with their individual learning styles, which increases learning opportunities. Our curricula prepare students to think critically and solve problems in many contexts both individually and collaboratively. Our curricula, in conjunction with computer technology, help students address all the global, local and personal challenges that they will face in this 21st century.

School Lane Charter School - Neshaminy

Program of Instruction K-5

Reading – a combination of phonics, whole language, guided reading and literature circles are utilized as instructional practices for a whole language, collaborative, conversational based reading program.

Writing – authentic writing experiences are provided to teach the finer points of writing. Students use their interests, experiences and background knowledge to “practice” and learn the craft

Mathematics – Scott-Foresman textbook series is enhanced with real-world application

School Lane Charter School - Neshaminy Program of Instruction K-5

Science – inquiry based, hands on science units are topic based and spiral through the grades; student “wondering” become the focus of their learning

Social Studies – contemporary problem based exploration of historical topics; discovery approach to examine both self and global awareness within a democratic framework

Specials – visual arts, performing arts, computers, Spanish, physical education & health

International Baccalaureate Programs For Grades 6 – 12

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

These programs encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

What makes IB Unique?

They encourage **international – mindedness**, in IB students, starting with a foundation in their own language and culture

They encourage a **positive attitude to learning** by challenging students to solve problems, show creativity and resourcefulness and participate actively in their communities.

What makes IB Unique?

They reflect **real life**, by providing a framework that allows students to see the connections among the subjects themselves, and between the subjects and real life issues.

They support the development of **communication skills**, to encourage inquiry, understanding, language acquisition, and to allow student reflection and expression.

IB Middle Years Program – Grades 6-10

Students study language arts, humanities, math, science, foreign language, technology, the arts & physical education through five areas of interaction.

Approaches to Learning: strategies and skills that result in critical coherent & independent thought; capacity to problem solve & decision making.

Community & Service: develop awareness & concern; a sense of responsibility

IB Middle Years Program – Grades 6-10

Homo faber: appreciate the human capacity of creativity & influence; transform, enjoy & improve quality of life; explore relationships between science, aesthetics, technology & ethics

Environment: awareness of interdependence with environment; take positive responsible action for maintaining an environment for the future

Health & Social Sciences: develops a sense of responsibility for their own well being; make informed choices

IB Diploma Program – Grades 11 & 12

Students participate in six areas of studies:

- Language Arts & Second language
- Individual & Society – business management, economics, geography, philosophy, psychology, social & cultural anthropology
- Math & Computer Science
- Experimental Science – biology, chemistry, design technology, physics
- The Arts – music, theater, visual arts, film

IB Diploma Program – Grades 11 & 12

Three Core Requirements which give broader experience & opportunity to apply knowledge:

- **Extended Essay – engagement in independent research through study of question that arises from subject areas**
- **Theory of Knowledge – reflection on different ways of knowing and kinds of knowledge**
- **Creativity, Action, Service – doing tasks beyond the classroom**

SLCS Academic Achievement

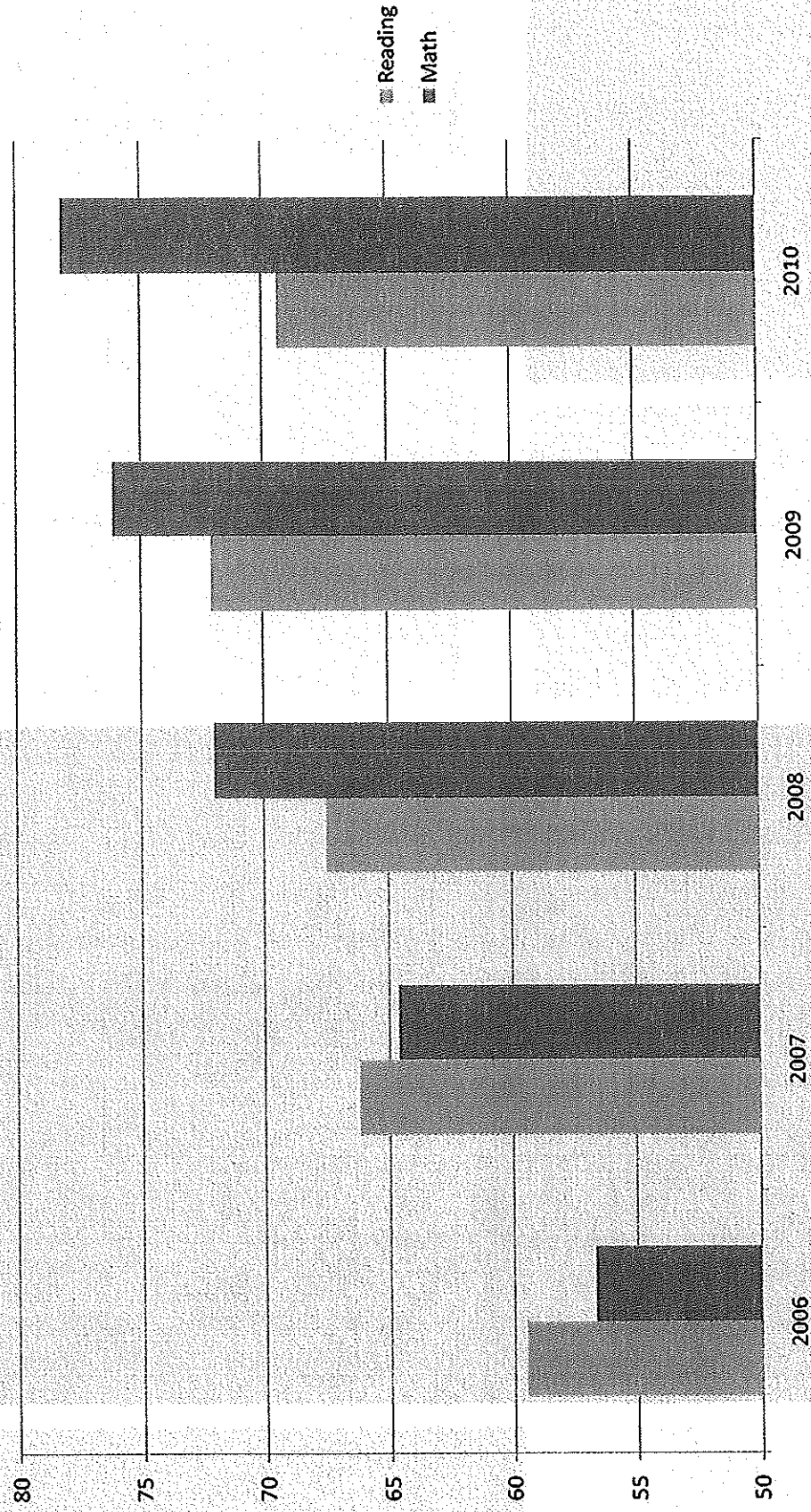


Pennsylvania Department of Education

Achievement Recognition

- Since the introduction of AYP standards, School Lane Charter School has made AYP eleven years.
- Last year, the school received its fourth Keystone Achievement Award for making AYP two consecutive years.

SLCS School-Wide PSSA Growth: Percent Proficient or Advanced



Percentage Point Increase in Proficiency from 2006 to 2010

