

Board members explain votes on keeping students in Sea Isle City school

By **MARY RUDLOFF**
Ocean City Sentinel

Smith said. "They basically bankrupted Upper Township. Why would we want to go there?"

Ellen Ramsey: Send students to O.C.

Ellen Ramsey has been a long time supporter of sending the students to Ocean City.

"A school board's duty is to provide a thorough and efficient education, with consideration to taxpayers. This is a situation we've known about at least 10 years, but the situation has not been dealt with," Ramsey said. "Why wouldn't we want to give our kids more opportunities that can be provided for less, which they can get in Ocean City? Unfortunately I don't think there is a future for this little school."

Ramsey said sending the students to Ocean City would offer them opportunities in

sports, the arts, music and other areas that the Sea Isle school, with less than 90 students and shrinking each year, can't match.

Matt McCullum: Sea Isle needs a school

Matt McCullum said the future of the school was the reason he ran for the school board in 2005.

"As a school board member and a parent, I am conflicted on the school. My children get a great education in this school," McCullum said. "There is a closeness we have at this school that we won't have going somewhere else."

"If we take the school away, there is no reason for families to move here to Sea Isle anymore. I don't think we want a community where families are moving away completely."

Terrence Libro: keep students here

Terrence Libro has been an outspoken supporter of keeping the school open since the topic was first raised.

"I do not want to close. If we close and the state decides to do something, we no longer have a seat at the table," Libro said. "Things looked bleak last spring, but we rebounded."

Libro challenged the published K-8 per pupil costs, which are the highest in the state. He blamed those cost on high school tuition to Ocean City.

SEA ISLE CITY - Prior to the vote on keeping the Sea Isle City elementary school open, each school board member was given the opportunity to present an opinion on the issue.

Robert Smith: O.C. hurt U.T. school district

Robert Smith was elected to the board in April for the first time. He previously served on the Upper Township school board. Smith used his experience gained in Upper Township, in dealing with Ocean City, as the base of his position.

"I know what it is like to be subjected to the Ocean City school board. They raise the tuition what they are told they can raise it. We (Upper) had to fire 14 teachers because Ocean City charges so much,"

Michael McHale: Do what is best for the children

Michael McHale, who has represented Sea Isle in Ocean City this past year, challenged many of Smith's earlier statements. He said that when he joined the school board a year ago, his main focus was to keep the school open. He said his position has changed after hands-on experience.

"We have to look at if we are doing what is best for the children. Are we providing for their needs socially, emotionally and academically," McHale said. "I don't think we can do that with the enrollment going down, down, down. I think Ocean City could do much better justice to our children."

McHale said he favored sending at least the upper grades to Ocean City, and if possible, retaining the primary students locally. He also wanted to investigate terminating the contract with EIRC and enter into an inter-local agreement with Ocean City to run the primary school that would remain in Sea Isle.

"That would benefit the kids and keep our community alive. The main thing is what is best for our children," McHale said. "I'm not looking at the money. I'm looking at the needs of the kids."

Tom Szczurek: Better opportunities in O.C.

Tom Szczurek has also been an outspoken supporter of sending students to Ocean City. "I am trying to do what is best for the students in this

district. We have a good school district, but if you do comparisons of the opportunities in Ocean City and here, it is night and day," Szczurek said. "Athletically, artistically, educationally, Ocean City has the resources Sea Isle does not."

Steven Zellers: Small is good for Sea Isle

Steven Zellers acknowledged how hard everyone linked to the school has

worked in the past few years to keep Sea Isle's school viable. Zellers said that, as a product of a large school district, he feels the benefits of Sea Isle's size makes keeping the school open the best situation.

"I attended a large high school, where I was just a number," Zellers said. "I think here, in Sea Isle, is a good situation for them."

Board members Maria Crudele and Joseph Schmidt declined to comment.