

**COLONIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
PLYMOUTH MEETING, PA 19462
MINUTES, JUNE 14, 1999**

President Kessler convened the June Work Session of the Colonial Board of School Directors at 8:48 p.m. in the Board Room of Colonial Elementary School on June 14, 1999.

Board Members Present: Stuart Kessler, Marc Orlow, Beverly Brown, Robert Carroll, Gary Johnson, Robert O'Neill, and Thomas Yunker.

Board Members Absent: Rich Connolly and Jack Pinheiro.

Also Attending: Dr. Stanley Durtan, Superintendent; Dr. Ann Stormes, Director of Curriculum & Instruction; James M. Bell, Director of Support Services/Board Secretary; Joseph Bickleman, Director of Financial Services/Treasurer; R. Scott Klinger, Director of Personnel; Fred Shipman, Director of Pupil Services; A. J. Dauterio; Allan Dovberg, President of Colonial United Taxpayers; Leslie Finegold; Diane Fisle; and Dr. Hugh Lipshutz.

Mr. Kessler led the Pledge of Allegiance. He also advised the community that the Board had met in executive session before the meeting from 7:30 p. m. to discuss legal and personnel matters.

Mr. Kessler directed Board attention to the minutes of the Personnel Committee Meeting of 05/10/99, the Community Relations Committee of 05/13/99, the Buildings & Grounds/Curriculum Committee Meeting of 05/17/99, the Work Session of 05/17/99, the Buildings & Grounds Committee Meeting of 05/20/99, the General Meeting of 05/20/99, and the Buildings and Grounds/Curriculum Committee Meeting of 06/01/99, as shown in Enclosures #1 through #7. Mr. Carroll raised some concerns with Enclosure #6. He requested that the summary of the comments made during the Personnel Committee Report as outlined on page 2959 be amended to reflect, verbatim, the response made by Mr. Pinheiro to Mr. Carroll's query concerning the availability of compensation packages similar to that being offered to Mr. Klinger to other district employees. After some discussion of the summary nature of Board minutes, the Board reached a consensus to direct the secretary to amend the minutes to reflect the verbatim comments. (Note: The minutes were subsequently amended as directed.)

Financial Reports: Mr. Kessler referred board members to the Budget Transfers Report of 06/99; the Bond Fund Report for the month ending 05/31/99; the Capital Projects Report for the month ending 05/31/99; the General Fund/Federal Program Bills; the Capital Reserve Fund Report for the month ending 05/31/99; the Food Service Bills/Cafeteria Report of 04/30/99; the Outstanding Investment Report, the Cash Flow Summary, the Comparison of Taxes Collected, the Real Estate Tax

Escrow Report, and the Reconciliation of Cash Accounts for the month ending 05/31/99; the Budget Analysis of 06/07/99; and the Treasurer's Report for the month ending 05/31/99, as shown in Enclosures #8 through #19. In response to a query by Mr. Yunker, Mr. Bickleman confirmed that the dates at the bottom of the first page of Enclosure #9 were correctly shown as 06/30/99.

Old Business: At Mr. Kessler's request, Dr. Durtan announced that board members had received renumbered copies of the Colonial School District Policy Manual. He explained that the policies themselves had not been changed but only renumbered to conform to the system advocated by PSBA. In response to a query by Mr. Carroll, he advised that the new numbering system was more functional and a standard that many of the other districts in the commonwealth had adopted.

Correspondence: Mr. Kessler directed Board attention to several pieces of correspondence in which parents of students in Ridge Park Elementary School recommended the addition third grade teacher/class to that school for the 1999-2000 school year. (See Enclosure #20.) Dr. Durtan reviewed the current number of students in four classes (96), and he advised that administration was closely monitoring the situation. He also reported that funds for an additional teacher were included in the budget and that an additional class would be created if it were necessary to keep class size within the district guideline of 24 students per class at that grade level.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Durtan briefly reviewed his personnel report as shown in Enclosures #21 through #24. He noted that there were no additions to regular staff, only resignations, leaves and transfers. He recommended additions to substitute lists and appointments to summer school staff and noted the return of long-term substitutes to the list of per diem substitutes at the close of the current school year. In response to a question from Ms. Brown on the possibility of nepotism, Dr. Durtan indicated that there were no relatives of board members on the list but that there were two graduates of the district home from college for the summer who were interested in substitute work. He reported that these students were children of current district employees.

New Business: Mr. Kessler directed the attention of the Board to the pending adoption of the district budget for the 1999-2000 school year at the general meeting the following Thursday. He requested input from the community and his fellow board members on the proposed budget. He noted that Dr. Lipshutz had sought clarification about the cost of cellular telephone service and reported that the numbers included in the most recent update of budget figures were not the cost of cellular service but the cost of all telephone services. Mr. Bickleman reported that the cost of new cellular services, including the cost of the phones and their anticipated use, was estimated at \$3,600.00 for the coming year. In response to the queries from board members, Mr. Bickleman, Mr. Bell and Dr. Durtan provided a

brief summary of the cellular services used by district office administrators and provided to three district schools under grants.

Mr. Dovberg asked if the district had records of cellular telephone use and conducted random checks to see that the phones were used for district business. He also asked if administrators took the phones home. Dr. Durtan advised that administrators did take the phones home at night, but he and Ms. Brown also noted that the bills were checked monthly to insure appropriate use. Mr. Dovberg shared with the Board his summary of additional positions listed in earlier budget materials and sought a confirmation of the actual number of proposed new positions by the Thursday meeting. He also asked for an explanation of the increase of approximately 20.8 percent in benefits costs. Mr. Orlow and Ms. Brown advised that there had been an increase in premiums but not in benefits. Mr. Dovberg suggested that the approximately \$500,000.00 increase in benefits might be offset by about the same amount of savings in the cost of retirement benefits. Ms. Brown reminded him that it could not be a complete wash because the state would also be lowering its retirement contribution. Mr. Dovberg stated his belief that the Board could fund district needs for the coming school year with a zero mill budget. He inquired about the district's efforts on Y2K issues, and Ms. Brown reported that a statement on the steps that the district was taking was available in the district office. Mr. Dovberg suggested that figures in the food service program seemed out of kilter for the year when compared to prior years. Ms. Brown reported that the district was not funding a deficit, and Mr. Bickleman advised that he would be looking at the figures and working on the year-end reconciliations. Mr. Dovberg expressed concern about the additional \$112,000 budgeted for the family and consumer science program at the high school and suggested that there might be better applications for such funds. He also felt that the district had to prioritize its needs. Ms. Brown agreed that spending additional money on the family and consumer science program was inappropriate. Mr. Dovberg reminded the Board that he raised his questions to get answers for the public and not to chastise any members of the Board.

Dr. Lipshutz noted the effort to change how the family and consumer science program was delivered but felt that the money involved in the proposal would be better spent elsewhere. He asked if there were telephones in all district classrooms and learned that there were not. He also learned that two-way communication between classrooms and the school office was possible via intercom in the elementary schools where telephone service was not available in all classrooms. Dr. Lipshutz suggested that adding additional social workers to the district staff might be better than adding an additional psychologist. Mr. Shipman acknowledged the help that social workers could give but also reported that the psychologist would wear many hats and would be valuable in helping the district keep up with increasing special education needs, especially since IDEA expanded special education to include children with attention deficit disorder. Mr. Orlow noted that the district felt that it could secure additional revenue to pay the cost for the

psychologist by billing Medical Assistance (MA) for services provided to eligible students. There was discussion about the relative merits of social workers and psychologists in meeting identified district needs. Dr. Lipshutz noted that specialized clerical support might be necessary to handle MA billing. Mr. Shipman acknowledged the value of social workers in this and several other areas but reiterated his belief that the additional psychologist was more than justified by the additional needs in special education, regardless of the revenue possibilities involved in MA billings. In response to a query by Dr. Lipshutz about class size at the elementary level, Dr. Durtan advised that the district had used the district standard of 24 students per class when developing the budget. He reported that two unassigned teaching positions were included in the budget to cover contingencies. In response to a follow-up question from Mr. Orlow, Dr. Durtan indicated that the slot for the added teacher for Ridge Park Elementary School was already in the budget for that building but not yet filled. He also indicated that of the two unassigned slots included in the budget could be used to meet a similar need at Whitmarsh Elementary School if it developed.

Mr. Dovberg said that he was glad to see the district move toward MA billing for services where appropriate and noted that the district could hire a psychologist for one year and then re-evaluate the need before moving into the next fiscal year. Dr. Durtan confirmed that psychologists were members of the administrative group and that the district was not obligated to continue an administrative position from one year to the next.

Mr. Carroll noted that the budget update presented to the Board on 06/09/99 indicated a fund balance of \$2,055,000.00. He asked why the balance was so high and suggested that it be cut. Mr. O'Neill responded that it resulted from additional revenues because of new properties coming onto the tax rolls and an overestimate of expenditures. Mr. Orlow noted that the district did not budget a fund balance, and Mr. Yunker pointed out that the entire fund balance for the current year was being carried over as a revenue item in the budget for the coming year.

Mr. Kessler expressed concern about spending all of the fund balance for the current year to fund the budget for the coming year because of the impact of future tax increases that might result from using all of these one-time funds. Mr. Kessler also wondered what it would take to reduce the proposed 1.86 mill increase to a zero mill increase. Mr. Carroll asked board members what they would cut to get to a zero mill increase.

Mr. Bickleman explained the combination of additional revenues from interim taxes and other sources and the lower than expected expenditures that together produced the higher than normal projected fund balance at the end of the current budget year. Mr. Kessler pointed out that many of these favorable conditions which produced the large fund balance could have gone the other way. Ms. Brown expressed her belief that the Board could produce a budget without a tax increase if

board members put their heads together. Mr. Orlow suggested that members consider where they would cut and come back to the meeting on Thursday with proposals.

Mr. Yunker inquired about the latest data on teacher retirements. Mr. Bickleman noted that there were 12 retirements included in the most recent budget update but noted that Mr. Klinger had advised him that two more could be added. Mr. Yunker inquired if bond issue interest had been included in the operating budget, and Mr. Bickleman reported that it had not been included. Mr. Yunker expressed his belief that \$200,000.00 for pay-for-performance obligations should be included in the budget. Mr. Bickleman confirmed Mr. Yunker's belief that it had not been included. Ms. Brown asked that Mr. Bickleman get an opinion from the auditor on the issue. Mr. Yunker supported eliminating the cost of AP testing from the budget. Ms. Brown agreed. Mr. Orlow supported its inclusion in the budget.

Mr. Orlow suggested that the \$40,000 in the budget for repaving the parking lot at Plymouth Elementary School could be eliminated and the project postponed for a year. He suggested that funding for a full-time custodian being added at the high school for the science wing could be reduced by half because the facility would be open for only half of the year. Mr. Bell agreed that the reduction would be appropriate. Mr. Orlow indicated that he could not support \$112,000 for a revamped family and consumer science program at the middle school but would support a lesser amount to move forward with plans to change the program. Mr. Johnson asked for an update on what it took to run the current program. Mr. Orlow suggested that the district fund a full technology lab at the high school rather than half of a lab. He also expressed concern that the budget funded only five para-professionals for block scheduling at the high school when the principal was suggesting that ten would be required. He noted that Mr. Klinger had some thoughts on the subject. Mr. Yunker noted that the Curriculum Committee would be receiving an update on the issue at its meeting the following Thursday. Mr. Orlow had questions about how salary figures were developed in the budget, and Mr. Bickleman and Dr. Durtan explained that average figures were used for open positions but figures for returning staff were backed by personal data.

Mr. Kessler asked that administration develop a punch list of all the suggestions made during the meeting and that it be made available to board members before the meeting on Thursday so that they could consider them and come prepared to decide on whether or not to incorporate them into the budget for the coming year.

Noting the late hour, Mr. Kessler asked board members if they had any issue that evening with the remainder of the items on the agenda for Board action at its meeting the following Thursday. Ms. Brown noted that the contact with Carbon Lehigh I. U. for data processing support would be on the agenda and asked Mr. Bickleman if he was happy with their service. Mr. Bickleman answered in the affirmative and spoke highly of the district's relationship with Carbon Lehigh.

Some board members noted that they had heard of issues at the middle school relating to the timeliness of class schedules prepared by Carbon Lehigh, but Dr. Durtan reported that those had been addressed appropriately and that he had not received any recent complaints. Other board members reported that the high school principal had commented favorably on the support that the school had received for block scheduling.

Board members noted that several Board Policies would be on Thursday's agenda and that there might be lengthy debates on them.

There being no further business before the Board, Mr. Kessler adjourned the meeting at 10:35 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

**James M. Bell
Board Secretary**