

**COLONIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
PLYMOUTH MEETING, PA 19462  
MINUTES, FEBRUARY 17, 2000**

President Kessler convened the general session of the Colonial Board of School Directors at 8:00 p.m. in the Board Room of Colonial Elementary School on February 17, 2000.

**Board Members Present:** Stuart Kessler, Marc Orlow, Robert Carroll, Gary Johnson, Hugh Lipshutz, Thomas Marchozzi, Robert O'Neill, Jack Pinheiro and Thomas Yunker.

**Board Members Absent:** None.

**Also Attending:** Dr. Stanley Durtan, Superintendent; R. Scott Klinger, Assistant to the Superintendent for Administrative Services and Personnel; Dr. Ann Stormes, Director of Educational Services; James M. Bell, Director of Support Services/Board Secretary; Joseph P. Bickleman, Director of Financial Services/Treasurer; and Fred Shipman, Director of Pupil Services; Michael Gordon and Alicia Fabricio, Student Board Representatives; Jeffrey T. Sultanik, Solicitor; students being recognized by the Board and their families and friends; members of the high school wrestling team; district residents; and members of the local media. (Note: The sign-in sheet for the meeting was removed from the Board Room and not available to the Board Secretary. A complete listing of attendees was not available for inclusion in these minutes.)

Mr. Kessler led the Pledge of Allegiance and presented certificates of achievement to students for their community service in support of the Conshohocken Town Watch and their accomplishments at the District DECA Career Development Competition. He also recognized two district employees for accomplishments in their fields. A complete listing of those honored is contained in Attachment #1 to these minutes.

**Minutes:** Mr. Kessler asked for Board approval of the minutes of the Buildings & Grounds Committee Meeting of 01/04/00, the Curriculum Committee Meeting of 01/07/00, the Work Session of 01/18/00 and the General Meeting of 01/20/00, and the General Meeting of 02/02/00, as shown in Enclosures #1 through #5. Mr. Johnson moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to approve the minutes as presented. On a roll call vote. All voted in favor. The motion was carried.

**Financial Reports:** Mr. Kessler asked for Board approval of the following financial reports: Budget Transfers for February 2000, the Bond Fund Report, Capital Projects Report and Capital Fund Report for the month ending 01/31/00; the Food Service Report for the month ending 11/30/99; 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 01/31/00; the Budget Analysis of 02/07/00; and the Treasurer's Report for the month ending 01/31/00, as shown in Enclosures #6 through #17. Mr. Orlow moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to

approve the reports as presented. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

**Staff Report:** Mr. Kessler recognized Mr. William Wells, Chairman of the Colonial Foundation for Educational Innovation, who presented several mini-grants and one major project to the Board for its consideration. A complete listing of the proposed grants is contained in a memo from Mr. Shipman to Dr. Durtan, dated 02/08/00 and attached to these minutes as Attachment #2. In response to queries from board members, Mr. Shipman and Mr. Wells reported that the School Weather Network Program to be funded through the major grant would be available in all classrooms and to the community as well. Mr. Johnson moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to accept the grants. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried. Mr. Kessler thanked Mr. Wells for his and the foundation for their support.

**Old Business:** Mr. Kessler removed from the agenda the resolution to transfer \$500,000.00 from the District's Bond Fund to its Capital Reserve Account.

Mr. Kessler recognized Mr. Johnson who provided a brief summary of the Board consensus for 08/28/00 as the start date for the coming school year, as shown in Enclosure #18. Dr. Durtan announced that action on the proposed calendar would be delayed until the March meeting in order to give the Executive Committee of the CEA an opportunity to comment. Mr. Orlow asked about the order of snow make up days in the proposed calendar, and Dr. Durtan indicated that they would follow the same sequence that had been adopted in recent years.

**Correspondence:** Mr. Kessler reported that there were four items of correspondence on the agenda as shown in Enclosures #19 through # 21 and #36. He recognized Elise Kaplan, district resident, who had asked for the opportunity to address the Board. Ms. Kaplan spoke at length about her support of flexible grouping for math at Colonial Elementary School and distributed copies of a petition signed by others who also supported flexible grouping. She stated that she believed that it was important to look at program outcomes when evaluating research results. She recommended that the pilot be expanded and conducted as originally proposed in order to get the measurable results of the impact of differentiated instruction. Ms. Kaplan provided considerable commentary on what she cited as the positive results of differentiated instruction and flexible grouping in other schools. She suggested that the district look into programs being offered in other local districts, particularly Cheltenham School District. She asked for district support for the pilot and provided printed material to board members for their review. Mr. Yunker advised that he shared some of Ms. Kaplan's concerns, briefly described the process that the district was following in evaluating flexible grouping, and reported that the curriculum committee was not planning to change its approach at this time. Dr. Lipshutz asked if the fifth grade plan allowed for faster acceleration in math. Dr. Durtan acknowledged the validity of many of the concerns expressed but emphasized that the district was currently providing differentiated instruction and was committed to meeting the needs of its children one way or another. He felt that acceleration might not be the district's goal. Mr. Yunker

noted the importance of establishing how to determine the success of the pilot and checking longitudinal data. He expressed some concern about potential scheduling and timing conflicts under flexible grouping. Mr. Kessler asked Mr. Yunker and the Curriculum Committee to continue to look into flexible grouping and differentiated instruction and returned to the agenda for the meeting.

Mr. Kessler noted that John S. Grispon, I. U. Board President and Dennis Harken, Executive Director provided information on the upcoming I. U. Board election and budget approval process. Mr. Pinheiro advised that the district was not eligible to nominate another member to the I. U. Board but that he would provide his fellow board members with an overview of the candidates prior to their voting on them.

Mr. Kessler advised that Michael T. and Beth Ann D. Hatfield, district residents provided a petition expressing concern with the start date for the coming school year. He also reported that Joseph V. Oravitz, Executive Director of PSBA, had written to advise the Board of the unanimous action of the PSBA Executive Board supporting the district's performance-based compensation program. Mr. Kessler again read, in full, the PSBA resolution contained in Enclosure #36 for the benefit of those in attendance and viewing the meeting at home.

**Superintendent's Report:** Dr. Durtan briefly reviewed his Superintendent's Report, as shown in Enclosures #22 and #23. Mr. Orlow asked about the appointment of a long-term substitute with an effective date of 10/20/99. Mr. Klinger responded that action on that individual had been delayed until an emergency certificate was on hand. Mr. O'Neill moved and Mr. Johnson seconded a motion to approve the superintendent's report as presented to the Board. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

**Board Student Representatives Report:** Ms. Fabricio announced the upcoming production of the *Music Man* by the Colonial Players. She also reported on Valentine's Day at the high school and on the end-of-season and post-season play of the wrestling team. Mr. Gordon provided an update on several music programs including the jazz band, drum line, and *Music in the Schools*. He also shared information on activities in support of Special Olympics.

**New Business:** Mr. Kessler referred board members to a series of Board policies being considered under second reading. See Enclosures #24 through #27. He noted that Board Policy #216, Students Records Policy, was designed to replace two older policies on student records for regular education and exceptional students. Mr. Pinheiro moved and Mr. Orlow seconded a motion to approve the adoption of the new policy and the deletion of the two policies that it replaced. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Kessler also noted that revisions to the Policy #227.1, Activities Code of Ethics, primarily dealt with the elimination of tobacco from the substances covered by the policy and adjustments to the sanctions for a third violation of the code. Mr. Johnson moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to adopt the revised policy on second reading. Mr.

Marchozzi asked the solicitor several questions about provisions of the policy, including the length of time that its provisions were in effect, the point at which penalties began, and the importance of the pledge that students and parents signed. Mr. Sultanik noted that the provisions of the policy were in effect from one year to another and that the district's policies, guidelines and code of student conduct applied whether students and parents signed the pledge or not. He noted, however, that signing the pledge showed that the child and parents had read and were aware of the policy and student code. Mr. Marchozzi reiterated his position that the policy was seriously flawed. Mr. Sultanik reminded the Board that the fundamental position underlying the policy was that participation in extra-curricular activities was a privilege. Several other board members restated their opinions on the policy and revisited the history of its development. Through discussion, the Board reached a consensus to continue its review of the implication of the various provisions of the policy. Mr. Johnson and Mr. O'Neill withdrew their motions, and the policy was referred back to the Community Relations Committee for further review.

Mr. Kessler asked Dr. Durtan to summarize the policies that were being brought forward for consideration on first reading. See Enclosures #28 through #30. Dr. Durtan recapped the provisions of Policy #234, Possession of Weapons Prohibited, noting that the definition of a weapon had been modified as directed by the Board the previous Monday. Mr. Orlow moved and Mr. Carroll seconded a motion to approve the policy on first reading. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Dr. Durtan reviewed Policy #003, Amendment and Suspension of Policies, and reported that the provision to require a two-thirds vote to suspend a policy had been incorporated as directed by the Board. He also indicated that references to Board by-laws had been removed because they were addressed in a different policy. Mr. Pinheiro moved and Mr. Johnson seconded a motion to approve the policy as presented on first reading. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Kessler directed Board attention to the annual request for funding for the Summer Consortium of the Arts, a five-week summer arts experience for students in grades five through twelve who are talented in the arts. Mr. Pinheiro noted that the \$6,300.00 was a subsidy for the program and not the full cost of operating it. Dr. Durtan and Mr. Bickleman assured the Board that the amount was funded annually in the district's operating budget. Mr. Orlow moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to approve funding for the program this coming summer. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

**Solicitor's Report:** None

**Committee Reports:** Intermediate Unit: Mr. Pinheiro noted that he had provided his update earlier in the agenda.

**CMCAVTS:** Mr. Johnson reported that Mr. Slauch had assumed the helm of the school and attended his first Joint Committee Meeting as Director. He also indicated that Mr. Yunker would be presenting the vo-tech budget to the Board this year.

**Personnel:** No formal report.

**Finance:** Mr. O'Neill announced that the Personnel and Curriculum Committees would be reporting on budget proposals in their areas on 03/13/00 and that the B&G and Finance Committees would follow up in their areas on 03/16/00. He also announced that the adoption of the preliminary budget was scheduled for 04/13/00, the annual budget meeting for 05/18/00, and the final adoption of the budget for 06/22/00.

**Curriculum and Program:** Mr. Yunker reported that the committee had met to take a look at a new foreign language lab with 35 computers, control software, videos, and digital recording. He noted that the current lab has not been operational since the mid 1980's. He also announced that the next committee meeting would be held on 03/02/00.

**Buildings & Grounds:** Mr. Orlow announced that the owners of the WFIL Tract had withdrawn their preliminary objections to the district's condemnation of the property and that the district would be able to tender just compensation and take possession of the property in the near future. He noted, however, that there would be some haggling over the final price for the property and that it would probably be decided in the courts. Mr. Orlow reported that the committee was recommending that the district contract with E. I. Associates to provide full architectural services for the development of the property from finalizing the basic design concepts through construction monitoring. Mr. Orlow moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to appoint E. I. Associates to the project at a fee of \$100,000.00, plus a site survey at a cost not to exceed \$10,000.00, subject to review and approval of a final contract by the superintendent. Mr. Pinheiro questioned the need for the site survey because he understood that one had been performed in connection with the building of the science wing at the high school. Mr. Orlow responded that that survey had not been done in sufficient detail for the development project. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

**Community Relations:** Mr. Johnson thanked the students who had participated in the Board Recognition program earlier in the evening for their fine efforts.

**Legislative:** Mr. Carroll reported that the governor's budget contained a 3% increase in the basic education subsidy and a 6.5% increase in special education funding. He noted, however, that the district was considered affluent and would receive substantially less. He also reported on a proposed student responsibility law, which would make parents responsible for the education of expelled students, and legislation which would deal with the issues of teacher shortages and early retirement programs.

**Public Comments:** A number of concerned parents, students and local residents spoke in support of the wrestling coach at the high school and expressed concern that the suspension

of the individual could hurt members of the wrestling team as they entered sectional, regional and state competition. Speakers stressed the requirement that a coach be present while the students wrestled and the impossibility that one acting coach could meet this requirement effectively when wrestling matches would be going on simultaneously at different areas of the facility during meets. They also commented on the psychological disadvantage that the wrestlers would face without their long-time coach and the importance of a good showing at post-season tournaments for those who were being considered for athletic scholarships at the collegiate level. Several speakers felt that the district was ill-prepared to handle unusual situations such as the one the wrestlers were facing and thought that more qualified coaches should be working with some teams. Some speakers pointedly questioned why the district could not comment more directly on the suspension and reasons why the coach might not be available to work with his wrestlers at sectionals the following Saturday. Some also felt that no one had had the decency to advise the students directly concerning the events that were transpiring. Dr. Durtan advised that the district was working as quickly as possible to resolve the issues and that a coach would be present and representing the district at the sectional meet. Mr. Sultanik explained to the speakers constraints under the school code within which the district had to operate when dealing with personnel matters. He declined to comment on particulars surrounding the case in question but noted that its resolution was a matter of priority for the district.

Several speakers spoke in support of flexible grouping, differentiated instruction and the recommendations made by Ms. Kaplan earlier in the meeting. Several asked the Board to support and expand flexible grouping for math at Colonial Elementary School. Several spoke about their concerns about the manner in which differentiated instruction in reading and math were being handled at the elementary level and expressed doubt that their children were being sufficiently challenged. One speaker said that he expected the Board to lead the community in the educational arena, and another indicated that the status quo in curriculum was not acceptable. Another speaker reported being thrilled with the education that the district was providing its students. Mr. Kessler noted that, his gut reactions aside, the research on flexible grouping was inconclusive and could not be used to prove one side of the issue or the other. Mr. Orlow felt that differences in student performance might be related more to individual teachers than to the methodology. Dr. Lipshutz noted that it was good to know that the resources would be available to do a better job as the district moved into the future. Mr. Yunker corrected and clarified some of the inaccuracies in speaker's statements about the district's current pilot in flexible grouping in math. He also noted that the district was in the process of addressing parental concerns. Dr. Durtan stated that, contrary to what some speakers assumed, Ms. Gill, a resource teacher, was not dedicated to the fourth grade. He advised all that the district was involved in diagnosing need and was committed to providing a challenging instructional program for all of its students. He asked those parents who wanted to address concerns with their child's educational program to contact his or her teacher first. He also suggested that they contact the school principal or superintendent, in that order, if their concerns were not resolved by speaking with the teacher.

**There being no further business before the Board, Mr. Kessler adjourned the meeting at 11:12 p.m.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**James M. Bell  
Board Secretary**