

**COLONIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
PLYMOUTH MEETING, PA 19462
MINUTES, MARCH 13, 2000**

President Kessler convened the work session of the Colonial Board of School Directors at 8:46 p.m. in the Board Room of Colonial Elementary School on March 13, 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; Fred Shipman, Director of Pupil Services; Donna Dickson, CSD teacher; Allan Dovberg, President, Colonial United Taxpayers, and Scott Helfand.

Mr. Kessler announced that the Board had met in executive session from 7:00 p.m. to just prior to the meeting to discuss tax assessment, personnel and legal issues. He then led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Minutes: Mr. Kessler directed Board attention to the minutes of the Work Session of 02/14/00, the Buildings & Grounds Committee Meetings of 02/16/00 and 02/29/00, and the General Meeting of 02/17/00, as shown in Enclosures #1 through #4. He also reported that minutes would be available prior to the general meeting the following Thursday for the Community Relations Committee Meeting of 03/09/00. Board members suggested several clarifications and corrections to Enclosure #4. Mr. Bell assured them that the changes would be made prior to the Board taking action on the minutes the following Thursday.

Financial Reports: Mr. Kessler noted that the following financial reports would be on the agenda for Board consideration the following Thursday: the Budget Transfers for March 2000; the Bond Fund Report, Capital Projects Report and Capital Reserve Fund Report, 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 2/29/00; the Budget Analysis of 03/06/00; and the Treasurer's Report for the month ending 02/29/00, as shown in Enclosures #5 through #15. Board members asked a number of questions seeking clarification of the solicitor's bills. They also sought confirmation of their understanding that the cost of various consultants on bond issue projects, including the solicitor, could be paid from the proceeds of the bond issue. Mr. Orlow also pointed out that the district could be reimbursed under a recently awarded state grant for some of the legal costs associated with the issue of performance-based pay for teachers. After some discussion among the board members and Mr. Bickleman, the Board reached a consensus to look into the issues raised and make the necessary one-time

transfers to charge payments of consultants' fees to the most appropriate accounts. Mr Kessler asked to see the month-to-month bills from the solicitor.

Budget Report: Mr. Pinheiro provided basic background information on projected personnel needs and costs for the coming school year. He stressed that the data that he was providing was preliminary and would be reviewed and adjusted, as necessary, throughout the budget process as more complete information became available and Board decisions were made. Mr. Pinheiro reported that the district had approximately 600 employees, 350 of whom were professional staff members. He noted that approximately 70 percent of the district budget represented salaries, wages and benefits. He reported that, for the first time in a long time, administration was recommending some modest additions to the support services staff, namely custodial and grounds personnel to handle the upkeep of the additional instructional space inside our schools and more ground outside. Mr. Pinheiro also reported an anticipated reduction of five regular teaching positions at the K-3 level, the addition of one regular education teacher at Colonial Elementary School, the addition of one special education teacher at the K-3 level, three half-time resource staff at the K-5 level, one additional half-time family and consumer science teacher at the high school, two additional study skills teachers at the middle school, and the addition of a computer resource employee for the K-3 schools. He also noted that the district traditionally budgeted for two additional professional staff positions that were filled only if needed to address hot spots which were developed after budget adoption. Mr. Pinheiro reported some adjustments to the district's cost for employee benefits. He noted a seven percent increase in health insurance premiums which would be offset somewhat by the change of plans for support staff to the Personal Choice 215 Plan and the beginning of co-payments. He also reported a reduction in retirement contributions. Board members expressed interest in seeing details of the personnel costs and asked questions about class sizes at the elementary level. Dr. Durtan addressed the latter issue by reporting that the district used 24 students per classroom when planning at the K-5 level.

Mr. Yunker reviewed with the Board a handout on the proposed curriculum budget for the coming school year. He highlighted on-cycle curriculum initiatives in art and language arts totaling \$104,392.00, a multi-media language laboratory at the high school for \$205,000.00, and technology initiatives across all grade levels in the amount of \$763,024.00. Mr. Yunker noted that the technology initiatives put the district on a five-year technology cycle and would result in the replacement of all K-5 computers over the course of this and the coming school year. He also reminded the Board that the recommended funding plan called for the district to borrow \$400,000.00 from the bond fund to cover lease costs initially and then repay the fund later. Mr. Bickleman responded to questions from board members about this arrangement and noted that the district had followed a similar procedure for funding technology in the past. Mr. Yunker reported that the district would be looking at annual funding for technology in the \$750,000.00 - \$800,000.00 range for the foreseeable future. Mr. Orlow inquired whether the Curriculum Committee had explored the possibility of replacing the keyboarding lab at Colonial Elementary School with a full training lab in order to save money by sharing resources. Mr. Yunker indicated that the committee had considered it but had not reached a consensus on the issue.

Old Business: Mr. Kessler advised the Board that the proposed 2000-01 school calendar would be on the agenda for Thursday's meeting for its consideration. See Enclosure #16. He noted that it had been reviewed with the Upper Merion and Norristown Area School Districts because of the three districts' mutual involvement with the Center for Technical Studies. He also indicated that the district had met its contractually mandated communications requirements with the CEA. Mr. Marchozzi queried whether the district was obligated to get an opinion from the CEA. Dr. Durtan responded that the CEA had the right to submit input but no right of prior approval of the calendar. Mr. Carroll said that he was glad to see that the CEA concurred with the need for staff development time. Mr. Yunker suggested moving one in-service day nearer the semester break at the high school. He noted that his suggestion would result in the first semester being a little shorter than the second but also expressed his belief that more student time was missed in the second than in the first.

Mr. Kessler reported that financing options for the elementary technology upgrade would be on the agenda for Board action at the Thursday meeting. He noted that the Finance committee had reviewed the alternatives and was recommending borrowing from the bond fund. Mr. Pinheiro inquired whether the district had sought an opinion from bond counsel, and Mr. Bickleman reported that he had done so and that counsel saw no problem with the proposed funding arrangement.

Correspondence: Mr. Kessler noted that six items of correspondence would be on the agenda for Thursday's meeting, including Enclosures #18 through # 22. He recognized Dr. Stormes who introduced Ms. Dickson. Together they explained a young writer's workshop that would offer students scholarships to participate in a wide range of reading and writing activities in a program to be conducted at the middle school for two weeks from 07/24/00 to 08/04/00. The speakers noted that the program would involve small groups of students who would have an opportunity to work with an author and eventually compile an anthology of their work. Dr. Stormes reported that eleven students had participated in a similar program last year. Board members had questions about the application and screening process. Dr. Stormes reported that the program would be open to all those interested.

Mr. Kessler asked Dr. Durtan to summarize briefly parking concerns raised in a letter from Dr. Dombrow, a local resident. Dr. Durtan noted that that perennial concerns about off-campus parking had intensified recently. He reported that an increase in the number of students parking off-campus was a result of the limited parking spaces available on-campus and an increase in the number of students driving. He felt that there were two courses of action possible: Following through on plans to increase the number of parking spaces available at the high school when the current tennis courts were deactivated and altering the discipline code to make off-campus parking an infraction. Mr. Pinheiro suggested that the district not wait until the new tennis courts on the WFIL Tract became available. He suggested that it explore parking options with Whitemarsh Township authorities now. Mr. Marchozzi voiced his opposition to penalizing students who were parked off-campus legally. Mr. Carroll suggested removing the parking ban along

Germantown Pike. Mr. Kessler asked Dr. Durtan to have the administrative team check with Whitemarsh Township authorities on these possibilities.

Mr. Kessler asked Mr. Pinheiro to summarize the actions that the district would be taking when the Board addressed the four separate budgets of the Montgomery County I. U. Mr. Pinheiro noted that the budgets covered administrative services, curriculum development, materials services and legislative activities. He also reported that, while the budget was increasing modestly, district contributions would remain the same as the previous year. He reminded his fellow board members and the viewing audience that these budgets were separate from special education services to students, which were billed annually as the services were delivered. Mr. Pinheiro advised that the Board would be required to vote on the budget as a group and that board members would also have to vote on each of the four budgets individually.

Mr. Kessler noted that no Board action was necessary on correspondence from the state on the district's single audit report and that CEA comments on the 2000-01 calendar had been addressed earlier in the meeting. He acknowledged correspondence from district resident Janet Lentz on the Million Mom March, an event focused on gun safety. Mr. Kessler expressed his belief that it was a good cause but wondered if it was appropriate for the district to endorse an activity that was outside its jurisdiction. Mr. Marchozzi stated his belief that, as a political subdivision of the state, the Board had no role in endorsing such events. Mr. Yunker felt that gun control could be an educational issue.

Mr. Kessler took the opportunity to remind the Board that he was serving on the Board of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association and asked the Board and the community to forward to him any suggestions that they had on what PSBA could do to help Colonial School District. He noted that the next PSBA board meeting was coming up later in the week and asked for input by Thursday evening.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Durtan briefly reviewed his Superintendent's Report, as shown in Enclosures #23 through #25. He reported that his recommended personnel actions and additions and deletions to the substitute lists were routine and that he was seeking Board approval to begin planning for summer school 2000. Mr. Marchozzi asked about the process for securing substitutes, and Mr. Klinger outlined the application, interview and hiring process. In response to additional questions, he reported that subject areas shown on the substitute lists indicated the substitutes' certifications. He also reported that some substitutes worked outside their certifications when individuals with the desired certifications were not available. Mr. Klinger reported that a number of individuals on the substitute lists were currently inactive and that there was an on-going shortage of substitutes. Mr. Carroll inquired about the reasons that teachers might be absent from their classes. Dr. Durtan listed sick and personal leaves and district activities such as curricular and staff development work. He confirmed that data on days missed and the cost of substitutes was available.

New Business: Mr. Kessler referred board members to a series of Board Policies being considered under second reading. See Enclosures #26 through #32. He first referred to Board Policy #234, Possession of Weapons Prohibited –New Policy; Policy #003 – Board Functions – Policy Revision (and the two policies that would be deleted as a result of the revision); and Policy #227.1 – Activities Code of Ethics – Revision. Dr. Durtan reported that Policy #234 was the one in the yellow pages and not the one in the agenda for the evening. Mr. Marchozzi recommended thinking about and making final revisions to Policy #277.1 before taking action on it on second reading. Mr. Orlow suggested summarizing the outstanding issues on Policy #277.1 and discussing rather than acting on the policy on Thursday. Mr. Johnson reported that the Community Relations Committee was looking at proposed policy revisions.

Mr. Kessler next directed Board attention to two other policy issues that would be presented on first reading at the general meeting the following Thursday: Policy #311, #411, #511, and #911 – Firearms, Ammunition and Other Weapons and Policy #116 – Tutorial Instruction. Dr. Durtan noted that the former set of four similarly worded policies were drafted by the solicitor at Board direction to prevent district employees and visitors, other than law enforcement officials, from bringing firearms onto district property. Board members had questions about several provisions of the policies, particularly those concerning the district’s right to prohibit individuals who are licensed to carry firearms from bringing them onto district property. Mr. Pinheiro recapped the ideas that he had raised on this issue at the Board’s general meeting the previous month. Mr. Marchozzi supported the heightened sense of responsibility intended by the policy but questioned the district’s right to restrict licensed bearers of weapons. Dr. Durtan noted that district officials had the right to regulate activities on school grounds even without the policy.

Dr. Durtan briefly outlined the main points of the policy on tutorial instruction. He noted that the policy would permit the activities currently permitted by the district, subject to a ban on solicitation and regular review by building principals. Mr. Orlow questioned the last paragraph in the policy and Dr. Durtan, on reviewing the paragraph, suggested that the paragraph was not necessary. Mr. Yunker felt that there could be some confusion about summer school and summer tutoring, and Dr. Durtan agreed to rework the language of the policy in that area.

Mr. Kessler noted that there would be two trip requests on the agenda for the Thursday meeting for Board consideration. See Enclosures #33 and #34. The first was a summer language and cultural trip to Mexico for interested high school students and the second was a trip for FBLA students at the high school to state competition. Dr. Durtan noted that the Board would only be endorsing the educational value if it approved the trip to Mexico. Mr. Marchozzi suggested that the district check State Department alerts before taking action on requests involving trips outside the country.

Mr. Kessler reported that two bids would be on Thursday's agenda as action items. They were bids for a nine-passenger school van and locker replacement in the east wing of the high school.

Solicitor's Report: None

Committee Reports: **Community Relations:** Mr. Johnson reported that the Board would be considering securing the services of a public relations consultant and had interviewed potential candidates. He noted that the cost of such services would be \$100.00/hour for the first ten hours and \$150.00/hour thereafter. Dr. Durtan noted that the district would have to budget for these costs for the following year. During the ensuing discussion, Mr. Carroll and Mr. Marchozzi expressed interest in hiring one consultant to suggest strategies and another to implement them. Dr. Durtan noted that an internal person could be involved in the public relations effort.

Mr. Marchozzi raised questions about the suspension report provided as information in the agenda. He asked about the 31 students in alternative education, and Dr. Durtan explained that these were the students in the Genesis program ran by the Lincoln Center and housed in the high school. Mr. Marchozzi and Mr. Carroll had questions about out-of-school suspensions, and Dr. Durtan explained the data presented.

Buildings & Grounds: Mr. Orlow advised that the Board would be considering a resolution at its Thursday meeting to pay the owner of the WFIL Tract \$1,952,528.00 as a good faith estimate of the value of the almost 30 acres condemned by the district. He noted that the final cost of the property would be determined in the courts but that paying just compensation would allow the district to take possession of the property and begin development. He briefly recapped the design work being performed by E. I. Associates for the district.

Public Comments: Mr. Dovberg provided the Board and the community an update on Technology 2000. He reported that: This year's program was scheduled for Saturday, March 25th from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Wissahickon Middle School. Mascots from local professional sports teams would be in attendance. One lucky student would receive an Apple computer as a prize. Food, other prizes and souvenirs would be available. Board members, administrators, students and their families, and the general public were warmly invited and encouraged to attend to see the fine work being done by students in local schools.

Mr. Dovberg sought and received reassurance from Dr. Durtan that some provision would be made so that students attending the FBLA state competition could keep up with their classwork. Dr. Durtan noted that high school clubs had foregone some competitions this year because of block scheduling and that the administration had placed emphasis on making up and catching up on work when students missed classes to participate in certain programs.

Mr. Dovberg questioned the deletion of tobacco from the list of substances prohibited by the activities code of ethics, especially considering the well-documented health hazards involved in smoking. He spoke in favor of eliminating parking bans near the high school. He also expressed concern about appropriate training for those who might be tasked with enforcing a district ban on guns on district property.

There being no further business before the Board, Mr. Kessler adjourned the meeting at 10:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

**James M. Bell
Board Secretary**