

**COLONIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
PLYMOUTH MEETING, PA 19462
MINUTES, JUNE 21, 2001**

President Orlow convened the general meeting of the Colonial Board of School Directors at 8:07 p.m. in the Board Room of Colonial Elementary School on June 21, 2001.

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

Board Members Absent: None.

Also Attending: Dr. Vincent F. Cotter, Superintendent; R. Scott Klinger, Assistant to the Superintendent for Administrative Services and Personnel; Patricia Iannelli, 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; Susan Regan, Principal, Whitmarsh Elementary School; Allan Dovberg, President, Colonial United Taxpayers; Florence Baralt; Joan Borowsky; Jeanneane Bozzelli; Tom Gibson; Gina Gormley; Susan Hope; Phyllis Pupkiewicz; and Mary A. Smith.

Mr. Orlow led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Minutes: Mr. Orlow directed Board attention to the minutes of the Work Session of 05/14/01, the Buildings and Grounds Committee Meeting of 05/15/01, the General Meeting of 05/17/01, and the Personnel Committee Meeting of 06/11/01, as shown in Enclosures #1 through #4 and the Buildings & Grounds Committee Meeting of 06/12/01, the Community Relations Committee Meeting of 06/12/01 and the Special Board Meeting of 06/13/01, as shown in Enclosures #42 through #44. Mr. Kessler noted that the Board had just received the last three sets of minutes. Mr. Kessler moved and Mr. Yunker seconded a motion to approve Enclosures #1 through #4 and defer Enclosures #42 through #44. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Financial Reports: Mr. Orlow noted that there had been some changes to some of the financial reports which were listed as Enclosures #5 through #15 in the agenda. They included the Budget Transfer Reports for 06/01; the Bond Fund Report, Capital Projects Report, and Capital Reserve Fund Report for the month ending 05/31/01; General Fund and Program Bills; the Outstanding Investment Report, Cash Flow Summary, Comparison of Taxes, Real Estate Escrow Report and Reconciliation of Cash Accounts for the month ending 05/31/01; the Budget Analyses of 06/12/01; and the Treasurer's Report for the month ending 05/31/01. Mr. Bickleman reported that the Budget report contained some changes in

categories, Bond Fund Report had been updated to include some recent payments, and the Reconciliation of Cash Accounts reflected current data from the bank. Mr. Yunker moved and Mr. Johnson seconded a motion to approve the financial reports as presented. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor, except Mr. Pinheiro on Enclosure #6. He abstained on that enclosure. The motion was carried.

Public Comments on the Agenda: None.

Budget Report: None.

Staff Report: Ms. Regan, Principal of Whitemarsh Elementary School, and Ms. Pupkiewicz, Ms. Bozzelli, Ms. Smith, Ms. Hope and Ms. Gormley, teachers at the school gave a presentation on the reading program at Whitemarsh Elementary as students moved through the grades. They highlighted the use of technology at each grade level and the rewards and incentives built into the program to encourage student reading. These included a partners in reading program which paired kindergarten and third grade students, accelerated and independent reader programs, and an outside readers program. Incentives included certificates and small awards for accelerated and independent readers as well as a sleepover in the library for successful outside readers. The teachers highlighted the use of computer programs in support of reading and writing goals and circulated samples of student work in Microsoft Word and Power Point formats. Board members had questions about the impact of new technology on classroom learning. Teachers reported that the students had become more efficient, been able to do more reports and had benefited from the research, editing and writing opportunities the technology offered. Board members wondered whether the presence of technology had widened the gap between some learners. The teachers felt that it had given students greater confidence and that teachers were able to adjust for students who had computers at home and those that did not. Mrs. Borowsky, a parent, commented that the use of technology encouraged the students to become independent thinkers. Dr. Cotter commended Ms. Regan and the staff for the fine work that they were doing. Mr. Pinheiro wondered if a program of lending laptop computers to those without computers at home would be workable and beneficial. Most of the staff felt that it would be difficult to do. Mr. Kessler asked if the staff had any suggestions on the use of computers in the classroom. The two primary suggestions were to increase the number of computers in the classrooms from four to six to allow greater access and to purchase math software.

Old Business: Mr. Orlow noted that PSBA dues were on the agenda for Board action. Mr. Johnson moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to approve payment of the dues. Mr. Kessler was out of the room during the motion and vote. All remaining board members voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Orlow noted that the Board had deferred the approval of several textbooks until this month. Mr. Yunker moved and Mr. Johnson seconded motion to approve

the purchase of the books in question. Mr. Kessler was out of the room during the motion and vote. All other board members voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Correspondence: Mr. Orlow noted that the district had received a letter from Charles B. Zogby, Acting Secretary, PDE, congratulating the district for its accomplishments, as reflected in the report issued by the Auditor General for the years ending June 30, 1997 and 1998. Mr. Pinheiro moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to accept the audit report. Mr. Kessler was out of the room for the motion and the vote. On a roll call vote, all remaining board members voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Superintendent's Report: Dr. Cotter briefly summarized his Superintendent's Report, as shown in Enclosures #19, #20 and #41. He highlighted the recommended appointment of MaryEllen Gorodetzer as Director of Educational Services - K-5, Teresa Boegly as Principal of Colonial Elementary School and Denise Marks, Sandra Newman and Miki Garlin as Assistant Principals of Colonial Elementary and Colonial Middle Schools and Plymouth Whitmarsh High School, respectively. Ms. Garlin's salary, not listed in the enclosures, was set at \$74,039.00/year. Mr. Kessler had some questions about compensation during child-rearing leave. Mr. Klinger indicated that staff were not paid during such leave but that their jobs were guaranteed for up to two years as outlined in the collective bargaining agreement. Mr. Pinheiro reported that approximately 4% of the teaching staff was on child-rearing leave. Mr. Klinger confirmed Mr. Orlow's understanding that long-term substitute teachers held their positions up to one year at a time. Mr. O'Neill moved and Mr. Kessler seconded a motion to approve the Superintendent's Report. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

New Business: Mr. Orlow noted that the Board would be adopting a final budget for the 2001-02 school year. He noted that the budget had been reviewed and discussed extensively and asked Mr. O'Neill to highlight the key points. Mr. O'Neill reported that several additional retirements had been included in the revised document and that the board included an initial interest payment on proposed bond issue for capital projects. Mr. O'Neill advised that the projected increase in real estate taxes remained 7.04%. He noted that Board committees had carefully reviewed the budget and had supported Dr. Cotter's new educational initiatives and incentives. He thanked board members and administrators for their efforts during the additional meetings called to discuss the budget and Mr. Bickleman for the excellent job that he had done in getting the budget together. Mr. Marchozzi noted that the Board had gone over the budget carefully. He also indicated that, if one added state and local revenues together, there was virtually no increase this year over last. Dr. Cotter shared comparative information on budgets adopted by other districts in Montgomery County. Mr. Carroll advised that he would vote against the budget because the increase should have been kept below 3.5%. He felt that the proposed budget was unfair to senior taxpayers. He noted that dividing anticipated enrollment into the proposed expenditures in the budget would result in a cost of

\$12,430.00 per student to the taxpayers. Mr. Orlow reported that \$2,900,000.00 of the \$4,400,000.00 increase in costs was for budget items not under district control. He advised that no one was really happy with a real estate tax increase of 7.04% and noted that the figures highlighted the need to control costs. Mr. Orlow noted, however, that board members objecting to the budget should be indicating where they would propose cuts. Mr. Carroll noted that the board was considering another bond. Mr. Orlow responded that the proposed bond would not affect the budget. Mr. Pinheiro noted that, in fact, the budget included an initial interest payment for the proposed bond. Mr. Carroll declined to propose areas where cuts could be made and noted that his input would not affect the final outcome of the budget vote. Mr. Orlow moved and Mr. Kessler seconded a motion to approve the budget, as presented in Enclosure #21, at \$57,556,109.00, and to set the real estate tax rate at 13.84 mils, the real estate transfer tax at 1%, the amusement tax at 10%, real estate tax certification at \$20.00, and the billing date for real estate taxes at July 1, 2001. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor, except Mr. Carroll. Mr. Carroll voted in opposition. The motion was carried.

Mr. Orlow noted that the annual appointment of school physicians and dentists on the agenda. Mr. Kessler moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to approve the appointments as reflected in the agenda. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Orlow directed Board attention to a series of annual contract renewals shown as Enclosures #22 through #28. These included contracts with: Progression Group for homebound education services at a rate of \$23.00/hour, the same rate as the current year; Montgomery Early Learning Center for the lease of space at Colonial Elementary School at \$35,890.00, an increase of 3% over the current year; Montgomery County Head Start for the lease of classroom space at \$3,400.00, an increase of 3% over current lease rate; Carbon-Lehigh Data processing Center for business related services at rates that represent a 3.6% increase for business services and a 4% increase for student services over the current year; Davidson School for an instructional aide at a per diem rate of \$99.25, an 8% increase over current costs; Carol Webster, PT for physical therapy needs at a rate of \$56.00/hour, a 4% increase in costs over the current year; and Kim Hartranft, OT for occupational therapy services at \$56.00/hour, a 4% increase over current rates. Mr. Orlow asked Mr. Sultanik if the district's contracts with Head Start and Montgomery Early Learning Centers should address the issue of having the district held harmless for any interruptions or adverse impact on the two organizations in the event of a work stoppage by district teachers. The solicitor was also asked to confirm that the district could reclaim the space these organizations occupied if the need arose. Mr. Kessler moved and Mr. Johnson seconded a motion to approve the contracts pending the solicitor's confirmation that the above concerns had been met. Mr. Carroll was absent during the motion and vote. All other board members voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Orlow noted that the proposed agreement between the district and Bart Fried and the Delaware Valley Amateur Astronomers Organization for the use of the observatory at the middle school and recapped his comments the previous Monday. Mr. O'Neill moved and Dr. Lipshutz seconded a motion to approve the agreement. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Orlow referred the Board to proposed changes in the district discipline and non-discipline code and to the CMS/PWHS Handbooks. Mr. Pinheiro expressed concern about students opting out of finals and board members discussed the pros and cons of students being able to opt out of all but two finals if they had the grades required by the code. Their discussions revolved around several concerns – whether the final exams were meaningful, whether being able to opt out was an incentive to having the students study diligently throughout the year, and whether the Board should be considering changing the code in this area without additional input from administration and the ad hoc committee that reviewed the code. Mr. Pinheiro moved and Mr. Yunker seconded a motion to make finals mandatory. Board members had varying points of view. Mr. Pinheiro felt that taking finals prepared students for what they would experience in college. Mr. Yunker expressed doubt that the option not to take finals was an incentive to study. Mr. Orlow wondered if making finals mandatory might be meaningless. He also felt that the issue affected the grading policy and should not be changed again so soon without input from the high school. Dr. Cotter felt it advisable to collect and analyze data and explore the bigger picture and avoid a knee-jerk reaction that night. Dr. Lipshutz concurred and felt that it would be better to refer the subject to the high school principal and the Curriculum Committee of the Board. Mr. O'Neill was opposed to any change without additional background information. Mr. Marchozzi advised that no decisions should be made without serious discussion before the meeting. Mr. Johnson believed that the ability to opt out of finals was an incentive to study. Mr. Carroll noted that the ability to opt out allowed some students the opportunity to focus on certain courses and put students who could not opt out at a disadvantage. Mr. Kessler felt that the quality point system was flawed and that the subject needed careful thought. On a roll call vote on the motion to make finals mandatory, Mr. Pinheiro, Mr. Yunker and Mr. Carroll voted in favor. All other board members voted in opposition. The motion was defeated. Board members went on to discuss briefly the proposed requirement for gym uniforms at the middle school. Dr. Lipshutz wondered how parents would be informed. Dr. Cotter replied that a mailing could be used to notify parents of the change. Mr. Yunker expressed discomfort with the middle school having a captive market once a logo uniform was required. Dr. Lipshutz moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to approve the code revision as presented to the Board that evening. On a roll call vote, all but Mr. Yunker voted in favor. Mr. Yunker voted in opposition. The motion was carried.

Mr. Orlow directed the attention of board members to a proposed change to Colonial School District policy #227.1, Activities Code of Ethics. See Enclosure #31. He reiterated his comments from the meeting on the proceeding Monday. Dr.

Cotter noted that the reference to prescription medication as an offence under the code had been amended to refer to a misuse of medication. Mr. Johnson moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to amend the code as presented to the Board that evening. Dr. Lipshutz was out of the room during the motion and vote. All other board members voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Orlow noted that the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit Joint Purchasing Bid for fuel was on the agenda for Board action as Enclosure #32. Mr. Pinheiro noted that the I. U. consortium included most of the districts in the county as well as some outside the county. Mr. Bickleman confirmed that the bid prices represented a 55% increase in costs over the current school year. Mr. O'Neill moved and Mr. Johnson seconded a motion to approve the bid. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Orlow referred to a request for the approval of three tuition students. Mr. Shipman confirmed that Elizabeth Quinn and Zach Schoenwolf were retroactive requests. The former had transferred into the district. The latter was finishing out the school year after the family relocated. He also reported that Cara Clark was a student who would be joining the district in the coming school year. Mr. Marchozzi asked if the acceptance of tuition students was done annually. Mr. Shipman responded that once students were accepted, their cases would not come before the Board again unless the availability of space for the students became an issue. Mr. Yunker moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to approve the three tuition students. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Orlow noted that a proposal to amend the school calendar for the 2001-02 school year was before the Board for action that evening. He reported that the recommendation was to begin classes on the Wednesday after Labor Day, 09/05/01, rather than on 08/27/01. He noted that school, would still end on 06/14/02 but that Easter Monday would now be an instructional day and the calendar would have 184 instructional days and 192 staff workdays. Mr. Orlow noted that several factors prompted the Board to consider the change. The first was that it was possible that the teachers would go out on strike shortly after classes resumed and that the Board considered it needlessly disruptive to bring students in to face a strike a few days later. He also noted that if classes started before the current contract ended the teachers might have a claim to step raises before a settlement had been reached. Mr. Orlow advised the Board remained committed to working hard on a settlement but felt that the Board should follow its long standing policy not to pay raises until a settlement was in place. He felt that it was better to be proactive and advise the community of these issues in advance.

Board members discussed the proposed calendar and debated at length the designation of certain days as Section 1502 holidays. Dr. Lipshutz favored removing Rosh Hashanah (09/18/01) from the list and returning Good Friday (03/28/01) to the list. Mr. Yunker supported adding 12/24/01 to the list. There was

a general consensus on these changes. There was some discussion about whether the Board could alter the calendar without the input of the Colonial Education Association. Finally the solicitor agreed that it could do so if past practice allowed it. Board members debated whether to give tentative approval now and revisit the subject later. The consensus was to proceed with full approval that evening. Mr. Yunker suggested taking the designation of strike make-up days off the proposed calendar. The consensus was to designate tentative strike make-up days. Mr. Yunker noted that the make up days might not be designated in the order listed on the calendar. Mr. Yunker moved and Mr. Carroll seconded a motion to approve the revised calendar with the changes on which consensus had been reached during that evening's discussion. These changes included listing 09/27/01, 11/23/01, 12/24/01, 03/28/01 and 03/29/01 as Section 1502 holidays, subject to further modification. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Solicitor's Report: Mr. Sultanik recommended that the Board accept a proposed tax settlement appeal on parcel 65-00-01475-15-2 in Whitmarsh Township at a revised assessment of \$5,000,000.00 for tax year 2000. He noted that, under the agreement, the assessment on the property would increase by \$2,044,860.00. Mr. Pinheiro moved and Mr. O'Neill seconded a motion to approve the settlement. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Committee Reports: Intermediate Unit Board: Mr. Pinheiro advised that the I. U. Board had opened consortium bids for fuel, sports insurance, audio-visual equipment and the like and that schools participating in the consortium would be able to benefit from the large group purchase.

CMCAVTS: Mr. Johnson moved and Mr. Yunker seconded a motion authorizing acceptance of the lowest responsible bidder for the repair of the roof at the Center for Technical Studies from McMullen Roofing in the amount of \$698,343.00 and authorizing the application for financing. Mr. Johnson responded to Board queries about two bidders that had withdrawn their bids. He reported that the solicitor had looked into the withdrawals and reported that the vendors were within their rights to do so. On a roll call vote on the motion, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Personnel: Mr. Pinheiro provided a brief overview of the compensation on the agenda. He moved and Mr. Yunker seconded a motion to approve the salary increases for administrators and non-bargaining unit personnel and the substitute rate for the coming school year as presented to the Board. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried. Mr. Pinheiro also reported that the district had joined the I. U. Consortium for life insurance and would be changing its insurance carrier for savings of about \$7,000.00. Mr. Pinheiro moved and Mr. Johnson seconded a motion to approve the move to the new carrier as discussed with the Board. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Finance: No report.

Curriculum and Program: No report.

Buildings & Grounds/Transportation: Mr. Kessler updated the Board on an initiative that he had undertaken to explore hiring Gilbane to oversee the work being done on three time-sensitive projects in the PWHS-DO-CES complex this summer: Auditorium renovations and fitness center construction at the high school and field, parking and driveway construction on and adjacent to the WFIL Tract and Colonial Elementary School. He noted the fine job that Gilbane had done for the district on the science wing at the high school and referred board members to the proposal from Gilbane to serve as the district's advocate and construction manager or clerk of the works for an amount not to exceed \$29,120.00. Mr. Sultanik confirmed for Mr. Marchozzi that the cost of the services would be billable to the bond fund. Mr. Kessler moved and Mr. Johnson seconded a motion to accept the proposal from Gilbane pending the solicitor drawing up a simple clerk-of-the-works agreement. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Kessler noted that there was an outstanding change order for work performed by Scott Contractors on the WFIL Tract storm water retention basin in the amount of \$83,314.00. Mr. Sultanik and Mr. Bell suggested that the Board recess for a brief executive session to discuss the legal issues involved. After a five-minute executive session, the Board returned to its regular session. Mr. Kessler moved and Mr. Johnson seconded a motion to approve the change order. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. Yunker requested that administration provide the Board with updates, including key dates, on all projects underway during the summer.

Community Relations: Mr. Johnson advised that Mr. Sherman was working on a draft of the district calendar for the coming year and that board members should get their suggestions into him within the next two weeks. He also noted that the district's web site had won an award of merit.

Legislative: Mr. Carroll provided an update on activity in Harrisburg. He noted the passage of a state budget that included the tobacco settlement and work on several bills, one that would require uniform data collection by schools so that comparisons could be made among them and one on cyber-education. Mr. Carroll also reported the publication of new special education regulations and a resolution on new systems for funding education. He shared average salary information from the Professional Personnel Report showing that Colonial School District's average salary at \$59,848.00 was 26th in the state and 6th in Montgomery County. He reported that the average teacher salary in Pennsylvania was \$48,321.00 and the average in the country was \$41,820.00.

Additional Information: Mr. Orlow announced that William Caldwell had been appointed fact finder in the contract negotiations between the district and the CEA. He noted that the appointment had set a 40-day clock and that the fact finder's report would be issued by 07/30/01. He indicated that the report would remain confidential for ten days and that both the district and the CEA would then vote whether to accept the report or not. The report would then be available for public comment before the parties would take a second vote to accept or reject the report.

Public Comments: Mr. Dovberg was gratified to hear the presentation by Ms. Regan and her staff and see how technology had been integrated into the learning experience at Whitmarsh Elementary School. He agreed that children should have access to technology outside the school but did not feel that it was the district's responsibility to provide it. He suggested that the district encourage parents to take advantage of some of the low-cost options for getting computers and internet access.

Mr. Dovberg took no comfort in hearing that other school boards had approved budgets that equaled or exceeded the percentage increase approved by the Colonial School Board. He noted that many of them were growing districts. He also pointed out that there were many people in the district who were living week-to-week and were house rich and income poor.

Mr. Dovberg asked if board members had visited the CEA web site? He felt that district telephone numbers had been listed on the site as points of contact for union rather than district business. He noted that it was contrary to district policy for the CEA to use district property for union business.

Mr. Dovberg asked if district vehicles could be used for personal transportation and if logs were kept and expenses reimbursed if vehicles were used for personal business. He also asked how many new secretaries had been hired and wanted to know if every administrator had his or her own secretary. He felt that the district did not need so many support personnel. He asked the Board to look into these matters.

There being no further business before the Board, Mr. Orlow adjourned the meeting at 10:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

James M. Bell
Board Secretary