

**COLONIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**PLYMOUTH MEETING, PA 19462**  
**GENERAL SESSION MINUTES, MARCH 18, 2010**

President Johnson convened the general session of the Colonial Board of School Directors at 7:05 p.m. in the District Office General Meeting Room on March 18, 2010.

**Board Members Present:** Bernie Brady, Gary Johnson, Hope Luken, Susan Moore, Kathleen Oxberry, Tom Sigafos, Beth Suchsland and Mitch Zimmer.

**Board Members Absent:** Alan Tabachnick.

**Also Attending:** Dr. Vincent F. Cotter, Superintendent; Dr. MaryEllen Gorodetzer, Assistant Superintendent; Jeffrey T. Sultanik, Solicitor; Joseph P. Bickleman, Chief Financial Officer/Board Treasurer; Karen Berk, Director of Pupil Services and Special Education; Andrew Boegly, Chief Information Officer; Terry Yemm, Director of Operations; Richard Hartz, Director of Human Resources; John Quinn, Director of CITV; David M. Sherman, Community Relations Coordinator/Board Secretary; Jessica Piergiovanna and Stacey Wong, Board Student Representatives; Mike Azcona; Bob Fahler; Thomas P. Davis; Eileen Spector; Colleen Ciabattoni; Mike McKenna; Jane Rush; Liz McKeaney; Rebe Hayes Kennedy; Terese Boegly; Jason Bacani; Judi Lipson; Dan Balek; Karen Gebhardt; Colleen DiFabio Papazian; Gary Papazian; Kathleen Hamill; Donna Gaffney; Charlie Forster; Geoffrey Bram; Kelly Jowett; Denise Marks; Mary Thiess; Caryn Young; Sergio Anaya; Frank Whitehead; Robert Franz; Hope Garfinkle; Michelle Gilbert; Maria Conway; Leslie Richards and students receiving awards, their friends and families.

Mr. Johnson led the Pledge of Allegiance and announced that the Board had met in executive session on February 24, March 10, March 11, March 15 and March 18. He added that the Board will meet in executive session again following the business meeting.

At Mr. Johnson's direction, Dr. Cotter announced that several members of the Plymouth Whitmarsh High School (PWHS) wrestling team were in attendance to be recognized for outstanding accomplishments during the season. Dr. Cotter introduced PWHS wrestling coach Nate Wachter who presented student-athletes Sam Morrison, Lucas Wisniewski and John Michael Staudenmayer, all of whom eclipsed 100 career wins and qualified for the regional wrestling championships. Staudenmayer also qualified for the state championship and placed third.

**Minutes:** Mr. Johnson asked Board members to consider the minutes of the Work Session of February 16; the General Meeting of February 18 and the Facilities Management and Transportation Committee, the Human Resources Committee and the Finance and Audit Committee of March 3; the Community Relations and Student Life Committee of March 11 and the Curriculum Committee of March 15. See enclosures #1 through #5, #47 and #48.

Mrs. Suchsland moved and Mr. Sigafos seconded a motion to approve the minutes. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

**Financial Reports:** Mr. Johnson asked the Board to act on the financial reports on the list for approval. They included the Budget Transfers, the Bond Fund Report, the Capital Projects Report, the General Fund/Federal Program Bills, the Capital Reserve Fund, the Food Service Bills/Cafeteria Report, the Outstanding Investment Report, the Cash Flow Summary, the Comparison of Taxes Collected, the Real Estate Tax Escrow Report, the Trust Fund Report, the Reconciliation of Cash Accounts, the Budgetary/Deficit Status Report and the Treasurer's Report for the month ending February 28. See enclosures #6 through #18.

Mrs. Luken moved and Mr. Zimmer seconded a motion to approve the financial reports. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

**Public Comments on the Agenda:** None.

**Staff Report:** Whitmarsh Elementary School Principal Donna Drizin reported on the school's third-grade sleepover event. Teacher Jane Rush made a presentation on the writer's workshop and how a co-teaching effort drives the program.

**Old Business:** None.

**Correspondence:** Mr. Johnson sought Board action on an independent audit report from Barbacane Thornton and Company. See enclosure #19. He noted that the report is for the year ending June 30, 2009 and was reviewed by the Finance Committee. Mrs. Luken added that the report contained no findings, and she commended Mr. Bickleman and his staff on a job well done. Mr. Bickleman, noting the large number of administrators in the audience, thanked the building principals and other budget administrators on a good job in managing their finances.

Mr. Zimmer moved and Mrs. Suchsland seconded a motion to accept the audit report. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mr. Johnson asked the Board to consider a Pennsylvania School Boards Association resolution urging legislative action on school employee pension reform for Board consideration. See enclosure #20. Mr. Bickleman explained that the reason for the resolution is that the employer contribution rate for the state retirement system will increase 8.2 percent in next year's budget and may be as high as 30 percent by the 2012-13 school year. He stated that retirement fund earnings reductions and increased benefits to retirees is the root of the problem. Mr. Bickleman added that the hope is for the legislature to draft a different plan or amend future benefits for retirees. He confirmed for Mr. Johnson that all Pennsylvania school districts are faced with this problem

Mrs. Suchsland read the resolution for members in the audience.

Mrs. Suchsland moved and Mrs. Luken seconded a motion to adopt the resolution. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mr. Johnson sought Board action on a request to accept an educational materials donation from ASTM International. See enclosure #21. He stated that the DVD collection is valued at \$650.

Mr. Zimmer moved and Mr. Sigafos seconded a motion to accept the donation. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mr. Johnson called Board members' attention to a blue page in front of them. He asked the Board to consider acceptance of 325 TI-15 calculators valued at \$8,450 for use in PSSA testing at Colonial Middle School (CMS). Mr. Johnson noted that the gift is from Mr. and Mrs. Michael Schwab. CMS Principal Bob Fahler confirmed for Mrs. Suchsland that the calculators will remain the property of the school following the PSSA test. Mrs. Luken thanked the Schwabs for their donation and noted they have made similar donations for a number of years. Mr. Zimmer added that the Schwabs have donated calculators to all schools in the District. He noted that for years the donations were anonymous. He stated that he was glad the Schwabs have agreed to take credit for the many donations and receive the credit they so richly deserve.

Mrs. Suchsland moved and Mr. Sigafos seconded a motion to accept the calculator donation. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

**Superintendent's Report:** Dr. Cotter stated that his report consists of the Personnel Report and Substitute List and the Extra Duty/Extra Pay List. See enclosures #25 and #26. He noted that the report also includes a blue page entitled CEA Early Retirement Incentive Plan. He stated that the Board may wish to act on that item separately. Dr. Cotter stated that the Personnel Report and Substitute List contains five additions from the 20 actions reviewed on Monday. The new actions include one leave of absence and four replacements. He noted that one substitute and two homebound instructors have been added to the Substitute List. Dr. Cotter added that the appointment of an assistant boys' lacrosse coach has been added to Extra Duty/Extra Pay List appointments reviewed on Monday.

Mrs. Moore moved and Mrs. Luken seconded a motion to approve the first two items on the Superintendent's Report. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mrs. Moore sought Board approval of the administration's request to offer an early retirement incentive plan to teachers effective July 1, 2010. She stated that members had the document before them as a blue page. She noted that the teachers' union and the solicitor have reviewed the plan. At Mrs. Suchsland's request, Mrs. Moore explained that the plan will offer teachers an early retirement incentive based upon age and years of service. Mr. Hartz further elaborated that the intent of the plan is to induce budget savings by encouraging more senior members of the teaching staff to step down. Teachers who accept will receive a maximum of \$30,000 spread over three years. He stated that the target for budget savings is \$300,000 to \$400,000. Mr. Sigafos added that this was a creative way to exercise fiscal responsibility and at the same time honor the dedicated years of service by District employees.

Mrs. Moore moved and Mr. Sigafos seconded a motion to offer the early retirement plan. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mr. Johnson noted that the Board would jump forward in the agenda and consider new contracts for Dr. Cotter and Dr. Gorodetzer. Mrs. Moore stated that it was her honor to make a motion to approve the new three-year contracts for both Dr. Cotter and Dr. Gorodetzer. She noted that although covered under one motion, the Board will vote on the contracts separately. Mrs. Luken seconded the motion.

Mr. Johnson read a paragraph of a letter from PWHS Assistant Principal Joe Carracapa. The letter stated "Together, (Dr. Cotter and Dr. Gorodetzer) have continued to move our organization forward by being positive, constructive, outcome-focused and relentless in their pursuits to be 'Above and Beyond.' I believe their most impressive accomplishment has been their commitment to the vision they have created for success here in the Colonial School District. This commitment has earned them the credibility they deserve within our organization and has become the foundation for their leadership and success." Mr. Johnson asked that the entire letter be included in the minutes. See Attachment A.

Mrs. Suchsland stated that she was highly confident in both Dr. Cotter and Dr. Gorodetzer and felt that she was fortunate to live in such a fabulous school district. However, she stated that she could not vote in favor of Dr. Cotter's contract because she has personal questions regarding some of the financial aspects of the deal. She stated that her vote is strictly a financial decision and is absolutely no reflection of her opinion of Dr. Cotter as an administrator.

Mrs. Oxberry stated that she was of the understanding that the quality programs implemented by the "Above and Beyond" and Pathways to Excellence programs were nearing the maintenance phase. She noted that the position of assistant superintendent was created to help with the implementation of these programs. Mrs. Oxberry said that in these extraordinary times she felt the

District no longer needed an assistant superintendent. She stated that in the business world when a position is no longer needed it is eliminated for budgetary reasons. She stated that her vote is strictly for budgetary reasons and no reflection on Dr. Cotter. Mrs. Oxberry said that Dr. Cotter has done a commendable job.

Mr. Sigafos stated that the quality of the District is a direct reflection of the quality of the District's leadership. He stated that, even in these difficult economic times, he would hate to see the District not be able to continue to attract and retain the best of the best for financial reasons. He stated that he was confident that the District administration will find fiscally creative ways to negotiate this Act 1 environment.

Mr. Johnson stated that he has been fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with Dr. Cotter the past 10 years. Mrs. Moore added that she did not think she and other members could have stayed on the Board so long if not for the tremendous leadership of Dr. Cotter and Dr. Gorodetzer. She stated that Colonial is one of the best school districts in the state. Mrs. Luken and Mr. Zimmer concurred.

Mr. Johnson called for a vote on Dr. Cotter's contract. On a roll call vote, all but Mrs. Suchsland and Mrs. Oxberry voted in favor. The motion was carried, 6-2.

Mr. Johnson called for a vote on Dr. Gorodetzer's contract. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Dr. Cotter and Dr. Gorodetzer received a standing ovation from the audience and thanked the Board for their support.

**Board Student Representatives Report:** Ms. Piergiovanni reported on the PWHS Jazz Festival, the Senior Class Trip to Disney World and the success of the boys' basketball team. Ms. Wong reported on the foreign language competition hosted by PWHS, the Post Prom Fashion Show and the success of the swimming and indoor track programs.

**New Business:** Mrs. Luken asked the Board to approve the refinancing of the District's outstanding General Obligation Bonds, Series of 2005. See enclosure #24. She noted that the minimum savings target for the refinancing is \$175,000. Mr. Bickleman added that the last time the District refinanced a bond series the savings target was \$300,000 but over \$525,000 in savings was actually realized.

Mrs. Luken moved and Mr. Sigafos seconded a motion to approve the bond refinancing. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mr. Johnson sought Board action on a 2010-2011 school year calendar that incorporates previously suggested revisions. See enclosure #25. Dr. Cotter noted that the school year will begin before Labor Day and end during the second week in June. He stated that the calendar includes 184 student days and 191 staff days. Mrs. Suchsland inquired as to whether or not the District will have off the Friday before Labor Day. Dr. Cotter indicated that will be a half day.

Mr. Sigafos moved and Mrs. Moore seconded a motion to approve the calendar. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mrs. Moore requested Board action on the renewal of the District's dental plan with Delta Dental. See enclosure #26. She noted that the renewal would be effective July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2012. Mr. Hartz confirmed for Mrs. Suchsland that there is no rate increase for the plan.

Mrs. Moore moved and Mr. Zimmer seconded a motion to approve the dental plan renewal. On a

roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mr. Johnson asked the Board to consider 2010-2011 lease contracts with the Montgomery Early Learning Center. See enclosures #27 through #30. He noted that contracts call for a four percent increase in rental fees. Responding to a question from Mrs. Oxberry, Mr. Yemm indicated that the rate increase was prompted by increases in utility, custodial and staffing costs, and the fact that there has not been a rate increase since the 2007-2008 school year.

Mrs. Moore moved and Mr. Sigafos seconded a motion to approve the contracts. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mr. Johnson sought Board action on a contract with the Montgomery County Head Start Program to lease space in one of the District's four elementary buildings. See enclosure #31. He stated that this contract also calls for a four percent rate increase.

Mr. Zimmer moved and Mrs. Luken seconded a motion to approve the contract. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mr. Johnson directed the Board to consider proposals for special education summer programs including an extended school year program and a summer academy. See enclosure #32. Mrs. Moore stated that the programs were a positive for the District in that they are able to keep students in-house and not send them to other districts for services. She noted the budget savings associated with that and commended the special education staff on a job well done.

Mrs. Luken moved and Mrs. Suchsland seconded a motion to approve the special education summer programs. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mrs. Suchsland sought Board authorization for the Plymouth Whitemarsh High School (PWHS) 2010 Summer Bridge Program scheduled for August 2-20. See enclosure #33. Dr. Gorodetzer confirmed for Mrs. Suchsland that this is the third year of the program that provides select incoming ninth grade students with transitioning support from the middle school to the high school. Mrs. Suchsland noted that the program will expanded to included students coming from private and parochial schools.

Mrs. Suchsland moved and Mr. Sigafos seconded a motion to approve the program. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mrs. Suchsland asked for Board action on the Girls in Technology Summer Academy. See enclosure #34. She noted that the goal of the two-week long program is to increase girls' exposure to technology and science.

Mrs. Suchsland moved and Mr. Zimmer seconded a motion to approve the summer academy. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mrs. Suchsland asked the Board to take action on a request for PWHS College Counselor Pat Tamborello to attend a college recruitment conference at Salisbury University from April 15-16. See enclosure #35.

Mrs. Suchsland moved and Mrs. Oxberry seconded a motion to approve the conference request. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Mr. Johnson noted that the following student trip requests were reviewed by the CRSL committee. Mr. Zimmer asked that Board consider all of the trips in one motion. The first is for one PWHS student to attend the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association Region Band Festival from March 25-27 at Northeast High School. See enclosure #36. The second is for two PWHS students

to attend the state speech and debate competition at Susquehanna University from March 11-13. See enclosure #37. He noted that costs for the trip are budgeted. The third request is for Colonial Elementary School fifth graders to attend a Trenton Thunder baseball game in Trenton, N.J. on Tuesday, May 25. See enclosure #38. Mr. Zimmer reported that funding is shared by the school's PTO and families of the participating students. The final request is for the PWHS Indoor Guard to participate in a competition in Wildwood, N.J from April 30 through May 2. See enclosure #39. Mr. Zimmer noted that the cost of the trip is paid by the students with assistance from the Band Boosters.

Mr. Zimmer moved and Mr. Brady seconded a motion to approve the student trip requests. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

**Solicitor's Report:** None.

**Committee Reports:** Intermediate Unit: No Report.

CMTHS: No report.

Human Resources: Mrs. Moore stated that the committee received an update on a self-funded prescription plan initiative and will continue to receive updates from Mr. Hartz. She called the Boards' attention to an addendum to the Cabinet Level Compensation Plan. She stated that the plan is similar to the administrators' and supervisors' plan that was approved by the Board in February where that group voluntarily made concessions to help reduce the budget.

Mrs. Moore moved and Mr. Sigafos seconded a motion to approve the addendum. On a roll call vote all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Finance: Mrs. Luken stated that in addition to the Barbacane Thornton audit report, the committee heard a report from Director of Food Services Lori McCoy on the department's profit/loss statement. As of January 31 the projected loss is \$79,000. Mrs. McCoy noted a \$8,000 reduction in student sales and a \$15,000 reduction in vending sales primarily due to the economy and stricter nutritional guidelines. Mrs. Luken reported the Mrs. McCoy has instituted a "Grab and Go" breakfast initiative at the high school, is investigating a district-wide recycling program for plastic milk bottles and the possibility of reconfiguring the food preparation and delivery at the high school. Mrs. Luken also provided an update on the budget. She reported that the committee instructed the administration to implement previously reviewed budget reductions and to keep the real estate tax increase below 5.0 percent.

Curriculum and Program: Mrs. Suchsland reported that the committee was advised of new screening guidelines to identify gifted students that will be implemented in time for the next school year. The changes are a reflection of changes to the Chapter 16 regulations. Dr. Gorodetzer confirmed for Mrs. Suchsland that PSSA testing will take place during the month of April. Mrs. Suchsland also noted Pennsylvania's adoption of the "Common Core Academic Standards Initiative" and stated that Colonial's curriculum already aligned with state and national standards. Dr. Gorodetzer explained the intent of the Keystone Exams to replace 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA testing for the class of 2015. She reiterated the District's desire to have its current local exams validated in lieu of the Keystone exams.

Facilities Management and Transportation: Mr. Brady noted that the committee engaged in extensive discussions regarding community use of District facilities. He noted that the conversation will continue. Mr. Brady asked Mr. Yemm to report on Radon testing. Mr. Yemm stated that the District proactively tested radon levels in all schools during the month of January and all results were good. He stated that the District plans to conduct the test every two years.

Community Relations and Student Life: Mr. Zimmer promoted the Colonial Players performance of Beauty and the Beast and noted that this is opening night for the show. He also noted that the District is scheduled to host approximately 450 guests for the annual senior citizens luncheon and matinee on Saturday. Mr. Zimmer also noted that the spring sports season at PWHS is getting underway and reminded everyone of the boys' basketball playoff game on Saturday at Villanova University. He also reported on an initiative to obtain testimonials from alumni regarding their experience in the District. Dr. Cotter reported that the District had used the four snow days that were built into the 2009-2010 calendar. He added that the seniors had fallen below the mandated 180-day threshold by one day. As a result, he recommended that the Board amend the calendar and decree Monday, April 12 as a career and community service day for PWHS seniors thereby increasing their instructional time.

Mrs. Suchsland moved and Mr. Sigafoos seconded a motion that the 2009-2010 calendar be amended to reflect Monday, April 12 as a career and community service day for members of the senior class. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. The motion was carried, 8-0.

Safety and Wellness: No report.

Legislative: Mrs. Suchsland informed the Board of several upcoming opportunities to meet with legislators and noted that she will attend a legislative event at the IU on May 5.

Mr. Sigafoos reported that the Plymouth Township Parks and Recreation Department has some upcoming events of interest to the community. He promoted the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the community center scheduled for April 10, the Fishing Derby set for April 17 and a Wetherill Park ribbon cutting ceremony on April 24.

**Public Comment:** Mr. Franz suggested the fifth grade consider the possibility of traveling to the Camden River Sharks instead of Trenton to save money on the trip. He also stated that the reduction in vending revenue was a sign that budgets are tight and the District should consider that when building its final budget. He revisited the suggestion he made at the February meeting regarding a "Pay to Play" program for participation in athletics. Mr. Franz also listed a number of major capital expenses related to athletics.

Mrs. Jowett thanked the Board for renewing the contracts of Dr. Cotter and Dr. Gorodetzer. She asked what signal it sent to teachers and administrators to have Board members vote against the contract. Mrs. Suchsland reiterated that her vote was in no way a reflection of Dr. Cotter but was a personal financial decision.

There being no further business before the Board, Mr. Johnson adjourned the meeting at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



David M. Sherman  
Board Secretary