

**COLONIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**PLYMOUTH MEETING, PA 19462**  
**SPECIAL INFORMATION SESSION MINUTES, JANUARY 31, 2013**

Superintendent Dr. MaryEllen Gorodetzer welcomed everyone to the special information meeting of the Colonial Board of School Directors at 7:01 p.m. in the District Office General Meeting Room on Thursday, January 31. She explained that the purpose of the meeting was to provide community members with information on the challenges facing the Colonial School District (CSD), some of the highlights of the District's successes and how community members may partner with the District to maintain the quality of its programs.

**Board Members Present:** Bernie Brady, Mel Brodsky, Christina Frangiosa, Leslie Finegold, Susan Moore, Kathleen Oxberry, Heather Palmer, Beth Suchsland and Alan Tabachnick.

**Board Members Absent:** None.

**Also Attending:** Dr. MaryEllen Gorodetzer, Superintendent; Karen Berk, Director of Pupil Services and Special Education; Andrew Boegly, Director of Technology; Trevor Jackson, Business Administrator; John Quinn, Director of CITV; David M. Sherman, Community Relations Coordinator/Board Secretary; Sue Castle; Denise Marks; Beth Dzwil; Andrew McMaster; Joanne Walker; Kelie Schannel; Claire Meashey; Debra N. Berger; Robert Slagle; Bob O'Neil; Linda Trembath; Jennifer Dow; Representative Kate Harper; Theresa Westerfer; Beth Miller; Gail Kagan; Tara Horwitz; Greg Marks; John Kraus; Sheri Cummins; Jim DeMaio; Rosemary DeMaio; Mike Reardon and Thomas P. Davis.

Mr. Tabachnick also welcomed everyone to the meeting and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Overview:** Mr. Tabachnick stated that the value of a community is defined by the strength of its public schools. He added that one reason CSD is considered one of the best public school districts in the tri-state region is that it has been ahead of the curve in terms of offering a rigorous curriculum, the manner in which the curriculum is delivered through differentiated instruction, the integration of technology into curriculum delivery, professional development and more. But Mr. Tabachnick stated that the Board and administration are never satisfied and are always evaluating how things may be done better. He cautioned, however that it is becoming more and more difficult each year because of the financial challenges facing school districts across the state. He referred to local school districts facing cuts in staffing and programs because of financial stress. Mr. Tabachnick noted that CSD has not had to make those tough decisions to this point, but the financial outlook is daunting. He asked Mr. Jackson to highlight the District's financial condition.

**District Outlook:** Mr. Jackson presented a PowerPoint describing the District's zero-based budgeting process. He noted that the Preliminary Budget is currently online for public inspection, and that the Board will act on the Budget at its February 14 meeting. He noted that the Budget currently includes a \$4.6 million deficit, though the Board will balance the budget before final approval in June. Mr. Jackson explained that 80 percent of the Budget is consumed by employee salaries, and benefits, while other major budget items are underfunded state mandates for special education and transportation. He added that costs for healthcare and the state's pension plan are dramatically increasing. He also noted that the District's value-added programs, such as academic and athletic competition teams, full-day kindergarten, the marching band, and more, account for more than \$4 million of Budget. Mr. Jackson Reported

that CSD is faced with diminishing revenue streams in terms of lower investment returns, reduced realty transfer taxes, decreased federal funding, level state funding and overall property assessment depreciation.

**Successful Despite Challenges:** Mr. Brodsky reported that despite the fiscal challenges CSD has remained one of the top public school districts in the region. He detailed accolades received by Plymouth Whitmarsh High School (PWHS), Ridge Park Elementary School and CSD as a whole. He noted increased student performance on PSSA and college entrance exams, as well as achievement in state and national academic competitions. Mr. Brodsky also noted that to see the quality of instruction in the District all anyone needs to do is walk into a classroom and see how students are engaged. However, he cautioned that maintaining the quality of programs is contingent upon an improved fiscal outlook.

**Future Outlook/Being Proactive:** Mr. Jackson explained that balancing the budget in future years without programmatic cuts will be difficult because expenditures continue to rise much faster than revenues. He explained ways in which the District has tried to offset the revenue deficit, including conversion to solar power, conversion from oil to natural gas, streamlining staff through attrition, refinancing debt and looking closely at all other expenditures. Mr. Jackson also noted that the District has created three community outreach committees to find other ways to be proactive. The committees are Advocacy, Partnerships, and Fundraising.

**Partnering with the Community:** Mrs. Suchsland, the chair of the Advocacy Committee, asked Mr. Sherman to detail the District's efforts to obtain advertising revenue. Mr. Sherman stated that the Board previously approved a policy to allow advertising on its property. He noted that the administration has interviewed four companies for the purposes of identifying an organization to evaluate advertising potential, propose packages and sell advertising for the District. He stated that advertising would be concentrated on athletic venues that are optional for students and community members to attend. Mr. Sherman reported that revenue from advertising is not expected to be significant, but added that any additional revenue stream is helpful. Mrs. Suchsland stated that the Advocacy Committee has been focusing on improving and increasing communication with area legislators and getting the word out about proposed legislation that could have a negative financial impact on CSD. She added that it was important to get information to the committee members, have them spread that news to their friends and family members, and also encourage others to join the committee and get involved with the District.

Mr. Brodsky, the chair of the Partnership Committee, stated that the goal of the committee was to improve and expand relationships with local businesses in order to provide more opportunities for students without increasing expenditures. He added that it was important for students to have a real-world perspective to give them better direction for their futures in education or the workforce.

Mr. Tabachnick, the chair of the Fundraising Committee, noted that the group has explored ways for the District to begin fundraising like a private school. He added that the District needs to advocate for itself and find additional revenue streams in order to maintain the quality programs it currently offers. Mr. Tabachnick stressed that it was the goal of the Board to find ways to maintain all programs and not make cuts. He reported that the committee has explored various facets of fundraising, including annual fund drives, major gifts drives, capital campaigns, and even planned giving. He stated that the District has a renewed relationship with

the Colonial School District Education Foundation and will partner with the Foundation on an annual fund drive to kick off in late February. Mr. Tabachnick encouraged community members to contribute if possible and, whether they can contribute or not, get involved with one of the District's three committees.

**Public Comment:** Mr. Tabachnick opened the floor for public comment and questions.

Ms. Joanne Walker, of Lafayette Hill, stated that the PWHS Band Boosters have been supporting the Marching Band and music program for more than 30 years. She wanted the Board to understand that music is not an "extra" but rather an important part of students' education. She related an example of how important the music program was to one student with whom she had contact. She added that participation in music programs provides students with valuable organizational and time management skills, among others. Ms. Walker invited Board members to attend upcoming music events and competitions.

Ms. Walker asked if the Band Boosters could advertise during its annual cavalcade of bands. Mr. Sherman stated that all advertising needed to be approved by the Board. Mr. Tabachnick added that the Board would work with the group in a timely fashion.

Ms. Walker asked if annual fund gifts could be designated to specific activities. Mr. Sherman noted that designations would present a difficult accounting process and encouraged gifts to the general fund in support of all programs. Dr. Gorodetzer noted that fundraising efforts are a work in progress.

Ms. Walker asked about specific budget line items. Dr. Gorodetzer encouraged her to make an appointment with Mr. Jackson to discuss specifics. Mrs. Oxberry, chair of the Board's Finance Committee, encouraged Ms. Walker to attend the committee's monthly meetings.

Responding to another question from Ms. Walker, Dr. Gorodetzer explained that the District does participate in cooperative consortiums to gain favorable prices on bulk purchases for items such as healthcare, fuel and food purchases.

Mr. John Kraus, of Plymouth Meeting, noted the various community outreach committees the District had formed and asked why a "cost containment" committee was not created. Mrs. Oxberry invited Mr. Kraus to the Finance Committee meetings to become more familiar with District finances and to provide input.

There being no further public comment or business before the Board, Mr. Tabachnick thanked everyone for their attendance and adjourned the meeting at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



David M. Sherman  
Community Relations Coordinator  
Board Secretary