

# the OAKES newsletter

An Independent Monthly Dedicated To Improving Public Education  
Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

September 1988

## THE TEACHERS' CONTRACT - 1988-92

In April 1988, four months before the then-current contract ran out, the Board of Education of the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) reached agreement on a new one. It was an historic occasion and wonderful news; particularly for people who had experienced the six strikes in the 1970's and early 1980's that resulted in major losses of instructional time, badly damaged working relationships, and a severe loss of confidence in the school system.

Negotiations began in October 1987 with the presentation of more than 350 proposals by the PFT. In past years, most of these proposals would have been denied after receiving very little consideration. This time, every proposal was considered. School District negotiators viewed these proposals as giving them insight into what was important to union members and what bothered them. When a proposal was denied, there was a written explanation. Many proposals, inappropriate for inclusion in the contract, were dealt with through administrative directives. More than 25 of these provided for such things as a pay phone in every school, an effort to reduce paperwork, and more teacher input into decisions.

By March, all of the PFT proposals had been discussed and it was the School District's turn. The District's negotiating team,

ably led by the Superintendent's Chief of Staff, Professor Ralph R. Smith, sought to cast the negotiations in a new framework and conduct them differently. The School District's goal was to advance the "school improvement/education reform agenda" by creating an environment supportive of it. It sought to do that by hammering out an agreement that encouraged collaboration at the school level, and at the level of the School District's administration and the PFT leadership. During the negotiating process, it tried to develop a relationship with the union based on mutual respect, trust and regard. It sought to nurture "a shared commitment to creating schools that serve to improve the life chances of all students."

Several new provisions in the contract will further the School District's goal. The Experimental School Improvement Plan is one. The staff and principal in local schools may jointly develop an experimental plan to make their school better. They have broad latitude including modification of provisions of the contract such as class size, grading or scheduling. The plans require approval by the principal, ratification by 75% of the staff, and then review by a committee composed of equal numbers of PFT and School District appointees. The first plans will be submitted in April 1989. The hope is that these schools will

chart new paths to help children do better in school and that as staffs work together to develop and carry out their plans, they will discover ways to work more effectively and successfully with students.

#### COLLABORATION

"Instructional program assessment time" is another new provision. It is a period of ten hours per year outside of the regular work day that the staff of a school is to devote to careful consideration of all aspects of the teaching program. The contract calls for the principal and the PFT committee in the school to jointly plan for the use of this time. This is another instance where contract provisions will require teachers and administrators to work collaboratively.

Collaboration at a higher level will be furthered by the joint committees called for in the contract. The parties agree that joint committees "provide an excellent opportunity to develop creative, realistic and comprehensive approaches to a number of important issues." There is a new spirit and determination to use these joint committees to work cooperatively on important educational problems and questions.

The school improvement/education reform agenda is furthered by the stability that comes with a four-year contract. Following six years of labor peace, August 31, 1992 will mark ten years without a teachers' strike.

The School District made several contract proposals addressing circumstances and issues hindering improvement in the quality of education. One of these was the interruption of instruction caused by midyear teacher changes. In early February each year, teachers were permitted to transfer to schools they had requested if positions became vacant. Also, there

were changes in teacher allotments and teachers leaving and returning from sabbatical. In each of the last two years, more than 18,000 students have had their instructional program disrupted in mid-year as their teachers left and new ones came. The new contract eliminates some of the midyear changes. It restricts transfers to the beginning of the year, establishing the first Monday in October as the final date. After that, all teacher or School District initiated transfers must be deferred to the following September.

The School District, in a bid to retain all of the school day for instructional purposes, was successful in eliminating early dismissal for faculty meetings and providing for ten hours per year of principal-planned faculty meetings after school. Although this is much less time than before, it will be supplemented by the instructional program assessment time discussed earlier.

Another contract change should help to give support to and improve the skills of teachers who are having difficulty with control of their class or with subject matter. Previously, they had to be rated unsatisfactory at the end of the school year before they could be required to participate "in an appropriate professional development program designed to correct the weaknesses identified." Now, when a teacher is written up for the second time for performing unsatisfactorily in the classroom, s/he can be required to participate in ten hours of professional development. Two reports could follow two classroom observations toward the beginning of the year, thereby improving the instructional program for children much sooner and offering assistance to teachers much earlier.

All employees represented by the PFT will receive a 4% salary

increase on 2/15/89, 4% on 2/1/90, 5% on 3/15/91 and 6% on 3/15/92. Teachers will also receive a \$900 increase in their salaries on September 1, 1988. Because the increases are compounded, the total for the four years is about 23% for the average teacher.

The \$900 salary increase for teachers is connected to the cessation of extra pay for those high school teachers who taught 13 extra minutes per day so that the student day could be lengthened to conform to state requirements. This issue has a long, acrimonious history which was resolved by this contract. All high school teachers will work a day extended by 13 minutes and receive a \$900 salary increase. Elementary and middle/junior high teachers have always worked a longer day and will also receive the \$900. Although this was a costly way to resolve this issue, it probably does not increase the cost of the total package over what it otherwise would have been.

#### SALARY SCHEDULE

Beginning teachers with a BA degree who earned \$18,700 last year will be starting at \$26,000 by the end of the contract. Teachers at the top of the salary schedule who have a masters degree plus 30 credits will be earning \$50,000 after the last increase. Both the effort to recruit the best people into the profession and to hold those who are now teachers will be advanced by these salary schedules.

As of the last year of the contract, the salary schedule will reflect a small beginning toward the establishment of a career ladder for teachers. At the bottom of the eleven step schedule, the rate of pay for beginning teachers will stay constant for years 1 and 2 while they serve a probationary period. At the top of the salary schedule, there will be a new cat-

egory of teacher called a Senior Career Teacher earning \$54,000. To qualify for this new category, teachers must have a master's degree plus 60 credits or a doctorate, ten years of satisfactory teaching in the School District, and dual certification such as regular and special education. The \$54,000 salary provides an incentive for teachers to stay in the classroom and the dual certification increases the flexibility that the School District has as needs for particular teaching skills change.

The contract provides for improved medical coverage and increased contributions to the PFT's Health and Welfare Fund. The Fund is currently in debt and has had to cut benefits for PFT members in recent years. The School District will contribute an additional \$12 million to the Fund over the contract period. It is hoped that this will keep the Fund solvent and prevent any further reductions in benefits.

An effort was made to get the PFT to "pay for" improved health benefits. In prior contracts, the PFT has negotiated annual increases in the extracurricular rate of pay. This time, the rate is frozen until March 15, 1991. By deferring any increase, the School District will save several millions of dollars which will help to pay for the health benefit increases. A salary insurance plan which provided benefits the first day after an employee exhausted his sick leave will be eliminated. It allowed an employee to be absent with no monetary penalty and was subject to abuse. There is a less expensive plan, which requires a waiting period of from 0 to 7 days depending on the employee's record of previous absences for illness, which currently enrolls 80% of those carrying this kind of insurance. By eliminating the plan that has no corridor before benefits begin, the School District

expects to save dollars and see improved attendance with all that brings in terms of continuity of instruction.

Because the contract settlement came in April, the School District was able to incorporate it into the budget it presented to City Council. The School District argued, as it has done previously, that Council should look well into the future and increase taxes now to prevent very large increases or unmanageable deficits down the road. City Council, exhibiting foresight, accepted this concept of forward-funding. However, it passed a tax package providing only about \$20 million per year, an amount that was much less than was needed.

The Board of Education and Superintendent Constance Clayton, mindful of the very serious repercussions resulting from its inability to fund its contract obligations in 1982, made significant and painful budget cuts to reduce projected future deficits.

Even with the increased revenue and the cuts, the School District projects significant deficits beginning in the third year of the contract and reaching \$160 million by its end. Down the road, the budget must be balanced by

increased revenue, more cuts, or a combination.

\* \* \* \* \*

This contract with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers represents a break with the past, a departure from bargaining that took place between two adversaries. Both sides deserve credit for coming to the table prepared to give respect, establish trust and work for a contract that results in two winners rather than a winner and a loser.

The School District started out recognizing that schools will improve only when the minds, energies, and hearts of teachers and other school staff members are enlisted in the effort to improve education and when their contribution is valued. Success is going to depend on school staffs working collaboratively, being given decision-making authority and then taking responsibility for the results. This contract formally establishes a sharing of power and decision-making between principals and teachers and between the union and the administration of the School District. The groundwork has been laid for the kind of reform that can truly bring school improvement.

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## NEW TEACHERS NEED SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

Just a few short years ago, the School District of Philadelphia had a surplus of teachers and no difficulty in filling positions that opened up during the year except in some long-standing areas of shortage. Now the situation has changed dramatically. About 500 new teachers were hired last year and again this year, most for the elementary schools. Many were drawn from the pool of substitutes and the teaching ranks of private and parochial schools. The number needed each year is expected to remain at this level, or to rise. So far, vigorous recruitment efforts have been able to fill most needs, but not all.

Nationally and locally, there are dire predictions of severe teacher shortages in the early 1990's. There is no way to be certain about the extent, the year, or whether Philadelphia will be badly hit. A very large number of teachers are eligible now, or will become eligible for retirement over the next few years, but there is no longer any age for mandatory retirement and no one can predict with accuracy when teachers will exercise their option. However, the shortage is here and now for the students and staff of a school that has no teacher for one of the grades and no substitute available to fill in.

Philadelphia is striving for quality and wants to recruit the Nation's best and brightest teach-

ers. It is aided in its efforts to develop its pool of applicants by its pay scale and benefits package which compare favorably with private and parochial schools, child care agencies and some nearby school districts. Also, there are opportunities for advancement in Philadelphia to such positions as department head, support teacher, supervisor and principal. In addition, the new teachers' contract provides for a category of Senior Career Teachers earning \$54,000 beginning in 1992 and this too is of interest to those being recruited.

On the other hand, recruiting is made more difficult by the state requirements for teacher certification. In an effort to insure the quality of Pennsylvania's teaching force — a laudable goal — applicants are required to take a battery of tests given on two consecutive Saturdays. Candidates attending school or working out-of-state have to come to Pennsylvania twice to take the test and it is only given three times a year. A person recruited in mid-June cannot take the test until November! There is no out-of-state testing nor acceptance of other states' tests. Philadelphia loses potentially excellent teachers to other states and other professions because of this obstacle.

While there may be debate about whether or not Philadelphia will be able to recruit enough

teachers to replace retiring teachers in the next several years, there is no doubt that hundreds of new teachers will be coming into the system annually. Whether they come with no or some teaching experience, almost all coming into an urban district will find themselves in an unfamiliar and very challenging situation. They are expected to use the standardized curriculum, keep to a pacing schedule, administer tests, keep records, fill out forms, and prepare report cards. They have to develop the confidence, the presence, and the techniques needed to manage a classroom of children. Unfortunately, too many have to do all of this under circumstances that are very trying and unjustifiably difficult

#### TRYING AND DIFFICULT

Take Cynthia as an example. When she selected her school, only the city's most difficult ones were left. These schools serve children who live in the most poverty-stricken communities with the greatest social and economic problems. Anxious to prepare for her class, in late August she contacted the principal of her assigned school as soon as he returned to prepare for the fall opening. She received her grade and room assignment. She made three trips to take in materials that she had accumulated during her previous two years of private school teaching. On the day that teachers returned, it was a terrible blow to learn her room had been changed. Cynthia had to struggle to move her possessions the long distance to her new room. On top of that, the room was dirty and contained furniture that was in disrepair and the wrong size for her students.

Cynthia fared no better with her books and supplies. She began teaching with very few books and when some basal readers were finally provided, there was no

teacher's guide to accompany them. She had no dictionaries and no maps. Her supplies were very meager and there were no crayons, no scissors, and no tape.

Soon Cynthia realized that the other third grade teachers, while thinning the ranks of their oversized classes, had given her the most difficult students. Several children were woefully behind in reading, some were discipline problems, and many brought serious problems from home. Her thirty children would have been a sizeable challenge to the most skilled, experienced teacher.

To make matters worse, no one came near Cynthia for more than a week. The principal didn't introduce her to other staff members and made no attempt to help her get oriented to her new situation. She didn't even know where the teachers ate lunch or where the phone was.

This may sound unbelievable, but I heard stories of similar hardships from teachers in several different schools. Several teachers reported, and it is generally acknowledged, that new teachers are frequently assigned a class of the most difficult, low-achieving children, or are given a split grade which is a combination of two grades and requires the teaching of two curriculums. These are the classes that in many schools remain unassigned in June after the teachers that are returning in September are given the more "desirable" classes. These classes are too hard for new teachers and should not be assigned to them.

Under these difficult conditions, many new teachers are driven out, flounder, and/or are under severe stress. All of these outcomes adversely affect the education of children. A teacher who resigns disrupts the continuity of instruction for a group of children and the disruption may last for an extended period. The

teachers who flounder or suffer from stress cannot do the kind of job with their class that they could do otherwise.

The Philadelphia School District has a responsibility to do a much better job with its new teachers. The District should provide new teachers with assistance and support instead of putting obstacles in their path. There should be a firm understanding that generates from the top that principals are responsible for getting new teachers off to a good start. In turn, there should be ways for principals to get what they need for new teachers by going through proper channels and within a reasonable period of time. In addition, in those schools where the number of new teachers is large, the principal should be given special assistance.

#### INDUCTION PROGRAM

Cognizant of the difficulty experienced by beginning teachers even under the best of circumstances, the state requires every school district to develop an induction program. Since June 1987, teachers certified by the state must go through such a program in order to be permanently certified. Unfortunately, the state provides no funds so this program must compete with all others for dollars, but its importance requires it to be funded.

New teachers need and deserve a warm reception to their new positions, introductions to the staff, information about the school, essentials for the classroom, and offers of assistance and support. They need to be linked to one or more "buddy" teachers who will be available to answer questions about school and district resources, required forms and records, or to respond to concerns. If the principal can schedule a common preparation

period for those teaching the same grade or subject, an opportunity is created for sharing teaching techniques and skills, experiences, and what works. New teachers need to know from the beginning that they have "buddies" who will be there to be helpful on an ongoing basis.

New teachers need structured professional guidance and assistance from excellent teachers who are highly skilled in classroom teaching and management. They need such experts to come into their rooms to observe, make suggestions, or to demonstrate the teaching of a lesson.

In response to the state mandate, Philadelphia developed an Induction Program. In 1987-88, it had two parts. Teachers were required to attend 15 hours of staff development at a central site on five afternoons. These sessions were devoted to topics such as classroom management and effective teaching practices. In addition, there were eleven Training Support Teachers, each of whom worked with about 40 teachers. Although these Teachers were spread very thin and couldn't meet with new teachers often enough, they were helpful and their assistance was valued.

This year the fifteen hours is being required again. However, the Support Teachers were eliminated for lack of funds leaving new teachers with no assistance of that kind during the first semester unless individual principals could fashion some kind of substitute. A new program will start in February which is school based. Experienced teachers will be selected to serve as mentors and work during school and outside school hours with up to three new teachers in their building. Because this program is not yet in place, its feasibility and effectiveness cannot be judged. Assuming that it is successful, it should begin in September each

year. It should be supplemented by school staffs that are committed to giving new teachers a helping hand.

Everyone is looking for public education to improve the learning and achievement of the students. In the last two years, 1000 new teachers have joined the system.

At a minimum, they have affected the success or failure of 30,000 students. That is the most important reason for working diligently to find effective ways to get these new people off to the best possible start and help them to be successful in their work with children.

1/5/89

#### ANNOUNCEMENT

This will be the last regular issue of The Oakes Newsletter. An index for the last four years will be published in the spring and sent to all subscribers. Anyone else, wishing to receive it should send a request accompanied by \$4.00.

After nearly nineteen years and 156 issues, it is time for me to undertake something new. I very much regret giving up the opportunity I have had to research in depth, develop a point of view, and report on topics of importance to education. I know from the letters and comments that I have received down through the years that the Newsletter has made a contribution and brought about change.

I would like to express my very deep appreciation to the Alfred and Mary Douty Foundation which has supported the Newsletter since its inception in April 1970 and made these nineteen years possible. I am very grateful to The Allen Hilles Fund which has given generous grants to the Newsletter for the last five years. I want to express appreciation to Rita Oakes, a skillful editor, who has contributed immeasurably to the clarity and conciseness of each and every issue. I would like to thank Judith Bardes for her assistance, encouragement and counsel over this nineteen year span. Finally, I want to thank everyone who has contributed and subscribed to the Newsletter for their support and encouragement.

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## BRIEF SUMMARY OF ISSUES

September 1980 through January 1989

The summaries briefly describe the contents of each Newsletter. They are listed in chronological order.

"Index To The Oakes Newsletter" - Index by subject, April 1970 through June 1980, and a brief summary of each of the issues published during that ten year period. (September 1980)

"Superintendent A Failure - Must Be Replaced At Once" - Dr. Michael Marcuse should be removed from office. Educational leadership not provided. Poor planner. Abandoned merit reward system. Unable to bring people together to resolve issues. Many decisions and actions create mistrust. (September/October 1980)

"Ways To Prevent Drug Use By Young People" - Description of two drug prevention programs that focus on helping students to learn to respect themselves, make decisions, clarify their values and take responsibility for their own actions. How parents and schools can assist. (November 7, 1980)

"Potential Debt Mounts As Superintendent Spends" - Revised budget for 1980-81 relies on questionable revenue. Two major reasons for School District's money problems - revenue does not grow with inflation and superintendent misspends. (December 9, 1980)

"Superintendent's Abuse Of Merit System Damaging" - Almost all recent appointments exempted from merit selection. Under Marcuse, school system does not reward excellence and effort. Few black educators in top administrative posts in 1965. Some progress made by 1970. Ethnic organizations formed, in part, to gain promotions for their members. (February 2, 1981)

"Special Education And The Budget Gap" - Description of expansion of special education and those served. State reimbursement inadequate. Costs should be reduced. (March 3, 1981)

"Skills Emphasis Destructive - New Reading Plan Needed" - Reading taught in dreary, mechanical way. Broken down into countless skills and sub-skills. Pennsylvania Comprehensive Reading Plan offers alternative. Broad approach focuses on getting children to hear, read and respond to fine literature and to compose their thoughts orally and in writing. (April 8, 1981)

- "District Heads For Chaos - Board Refuses To Resign" - Financial crisis of very serious proportions. \$224 million budget gap projected. Revenue reflects little growth. Scarce resources unwisely spent. Should have achieved savings. No public confidence in school leaders. (May 6, 1981)
- "Schools Must Open - Budget Cuts and More Dollars Required" - Why teachers are striking. Effects of slashed budget. Need for reduced spending and increased revenue. Mayor denies guaranteeing contract and offers plan for long-term financial solution. (September 16, 1981)
- "More About The Strike, Cuts, And Mismanagement" - Effects of strike on teachers, administrators and parents. Tables showing dimensions of budget problem over next five years. Developing a survival budget. Why superintendent should be replaced. (October 14, 1981)
- "Mismanagement Leads To Legislative Proposals For Change" - State legislature considering new ways to govern schools because of turmoil over School District budgets and teachers' contracts. Proposals described. (November 1981)
- "Teenage Pregnancy" - Statistics, causes and adverse consequences of teenage pregnancy. The School District's elective course in "Fertility Control and Contraception." Curriculum to prepare young people for parenthood. (January 8, 1982)
- "Music Programs In Jeopardy" - Benefits to participants in vocal and instrumental groups. Financial support eroded. M.L. King High School jazz band is nationally recognized. (February 5, 1982)
- "A New Superintendent - What To Look For" - Board of Education should consult with mayor about selection of superintendent. Next superintendent will inherit a legacy of problems. What Board should be seeking in next superintendent. Should person be "insider" or "outsider"? (March 4, 1982)
- "Valuable Programs Must Be Saved" - State and Federal funding reduction jeopardizes desegregation program, services to lowest achieving poverty students and prekindergarten programs. (April 7, 1982)
- "Adopting The 1982-83 Budget" - Description of spring 1982 budget adoption process. Board of Education amended budget to make modest reductions. School closings not achieved. (May/June 1982)

"Supplementary Index to The Oakes Newsletter" - September 1980 through June 1982. (September 1982)

"The Need to Look Ahead" - The new superintendent. Teachers' Union 1982-85 contract settlement and its financial underpinnings. Students must be prepared for their futures in a complex world. School District must change its operations and administration. (Oct. 22, 1982)

"A Proposal to Reform Public Education" - Paideia proposal advocates a demanding academic course for all students to prepare them to continue learning all their lives, be good citizens and earn a living. Three distinct ways to teach and learn. (November 17, 1982)

"The Expectations and Mastery Learning Projects" - The Expectations Project is a school-wide effort to change the learning climate through the development of standards, monitoring of progress, rewarding of accomplishment and improvement of communications with parents. Mastery learning is a classroom teaching/learning technique based on the belief that all children can learn. (January 12, 1983)

"Students must Read to Learn, Not Learn to Read" - Reading and writing are not being taught effectively because they are divorced from content, e.g. literature and science. Such classrooms contrasted with those where reading, writing and speaking are integrated with subject matter. (February 15, 1983)

"School Closings - Pro and Con" - Reasons that parents, children and staff resist school closings. Further enrollment drop forecast by 37% reduction in number of births. Fewer buildings mean savings and other gains. Work of School Assessment Committee. (March 11, 1983)

"The Rose Lindenbaum Award for Excellence in Teaching" - A description of Dr. John McGovern's teaching and his classroom explains his selection for this award, given annually to ten outstanding teachers. Brief biography of Rose Lindenbaum and origin of her gift. (April 19, 1983.)

"Educational Reform - A Matter of Survival" - Findings and recommendations from the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Also a one-page School District budget update. (May/June 1983)

"School Safety and the Environment for Learning" - Task Force recommendations to provide good environment for learning. Five major issues

addressed: discipline, drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism and arson, graffiti, and neighborhood safety. (September 1983)

"Bilingual Education Should be Valued and Supported" - Arguments advanced for teaching non-English speaking students in their home language as well as English. School District utilizes three different methods and philosophies. Difficult to staff these programs. (October 1983)

"The 1983 Voluntary Desegregation Plan" - Based on striving for educational improvement and the achievement of integration. Has three major parts: Educational Improvement Plan, Desegregation Expansion Strategy, and Effort to Reduce Racial Isolation. (Nov./Dec. 1983)

"Computers - Their Role Should be Reevaluated" - Questions raised about reasons that school districts are investing heavily in computers for students of all ages. Costly undertaking. Computers used for drill and practice, as tutor, and to simulate situations. Used as tool in regular course work too infrequently. (January 25, 1984)

"Proposals and Efforts to Improve Public Education" - 1983 reports and books about nation's schools stress three themes: teaching profession must be elevated, students must learn more, and broad community must be involved in the improvement of the schools. Pennsylvania's action plan. Steps taken in Philadelphia schools. (February 1984)

"Creating a Climate for Learning in the High Schools" - Need to focus on high schools. Discipline code developed to improve climate for learning. Suspension rate too high. Bartram High School's efforts to achieve better environment for learning. At Bartram's Motivation Center, students know school cares about them. (March 1984)

"The Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative" - Teachers meet weekly to talk about children and learning. They find that they themselves have answers to classroom problems. In Cooperative, teachers find support and an opportunity to renew themselves. (April 1984)

"The Standardized Curriculum" - Tells teachers what is to be taught in each subject area at each grade level, but not how or when. New city-wide testing program to be based on goals and objectives of Curriculum. (May/June 1984)

"The Literacy Network Classroom" - Successful method for teaching children to read, communicate orally and in writing, think, and learn. Differs

in the ways material is presented and children participate in their learning. Two Literacy Network classrooms described. (September 1984)

"Ways to Promote Learning" - Students become engaged in their own learning and are helped to find meaning in what they read and study in described secondary school classrooms. Much to be gained from study of controversial issues. Classroom discussion is important. (October 1984)

"The Philadelphia High School Academies" - Students prepared for work in the automotive, business, electrical, and health care fields. School District and private sector in partnership. Emphasis on job preparation. Statistics demonstrate Academies' success. Availability of job limits expansion. (November 1984)

"The Voluntary Desegregation Plan - One Year Later" - 1984 status report indicates 1983 plan was successfully followed. Educational improvements made. Number of desegregated schools increased. Work begun on reducing effects of racial isolation. (January 1985)

"The Literate Environment Kindergarten" - Theories and methods drawn from studies of children who learned to read early in their lives. Literature and books at core of program. Children "read" and "write" from beginning. Children end year viewing themselves as readers and writers. (February 1985)

"The Philadelphia Alliance for Teaching Humanities in the Schools" - Joint effort of corporate community, School District, teachers' union and educational and cultural institutions to support, encourage, improve and expand teaching of humanities. System-wide effort to improve teaching of writing. Poetry and colonial history projects described. Enrichment opportunities created for educators. (March 1985)

"Testing and Evaluation" - New testing program serves dual purpose. Measures students' knowledge of School District curriculum. Makes national comparisons possible. New state test identifies students in three grades needing remedial help in reading and/or mathematics. Effort to prevent narrowing of curriculum. Means for judging system must be expanded. (April 1985)

"Preventing Drug Abuse" - Programs should include decision-making skills, heightening of self-esteem, learning ways to reduce stress as well as information about drugs. Existing programs described. Many students not reached. Suggestions for expansion and greater effectiveness. (May 1985)

"The Teachers' Contract - 1985-88" - Summary of contract terms. Five have economic impact. Some represent union concessions. Superintendent's "educational reforms" rejected. Board of Education unable to get commitment from City officials to fund contract. (October 1985)

"School Health Services - The Problem" - Poor fit between children's health needs and services rendered by School District personnel. Health problems identified but often go untreated. Last part of newsletter treats topic of AIDS and other HTLV-III infections. How virus is, and is not, transmitted. Description of School District policy. (Nov./Dec. 1985)

"Achieving and Maintaining Good Health" - Nurse practitioners can provide service to students more effectively. Health technicians are an important part of the team. School based health clinics offer one way to deliver needed services to children. Many other approaches must also be developed. Need to teach students how to achieve and maintain a healthy life-style. (January 1986)

"Replicating Success" - Program designed to help schools most in need of upgrading raise their level of achievement. Rooted in developing five attributes - climate for learning, high expectations, intensified instructional focus, clear teaching objectives, and a school principal who is a strong leader. (February 1986)

"Preventing Teenage Pregnancy" - Philadelphia's excessive rate of teenage pregnancy has high economic and social costs. What School District is doing currently and what it could and should do. Education for Parenting teaches children about the responsibility of parenthood which many come to realize should be delayed. (March 1986)

"Implementing the Modified Desegregation Plan" - Update on numerical progress. Description of "Adventure in Harmony", program for improving human relations, at Fellowship Farm. Other steps, e.g. staff training, taken to implement plan. (April 1986)

"Programs for the Mentally Gifted" - The Mentally Gifted program at the elementary, middle/junior high and senior high school levels. Reasons programs vary in quality. How one science teacher, Helen Ericson, works with mentally gifted students. (May/June 1986)

"Sweeping Changes Needed" - Work force needs "vast upgrading." Description of eight elements in A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century to attract highly qualified people to teaching and encourage high performance and improved student learning. (September 1986)



"The Importance of Music Education" - Some schools offer children a rich high-quality music education. Others do not. An exemplary elementary school program is described. Music education delivered by two different kinds of music specialists - vocal/generalists and instrumental music teachers. Why a quality music program should be supported. (October 1986)

"Adopt-A-Student Program Enhances Learning" - Staff members at Jackson Elementary School have "adopted" 57 students. Greatly reduces discipline problems and makes school better place for teaching and learning. (Nov./Dec. 1986)

"The Mildly Handicapped - The Focus Should Be On Instruction" - Quality instruction for mildly handicapped is an illusion. Teachers lack instructional expertness. In addition, they face classes with great spreads in students' ages, levels of achievement and ability to learn. Curriculum should be presented differently. (January 1987)

"How Children Should Begin Their Learning" - In many kindergartens the focus is on skills, drill, memorization and rote learning - formal teaching techniques characterized by a national organization as "inappropriate practice." In a few kindergartens, teachers strive to create readers and writers by having books for children to read and encouraging them to write their ideas and thoughts. (February 1987)

"Philadelphia Renaissance in Science and Mathematics" - PRISM is a joint effort of business, School District, teachers' union and educational and scientific/cultural institutions to strengthen the teaching of mathematics and science. Several initiatives undertaken, e.g. classroom science kits. PRIME encourages minorities to go into mathematics and science-based professions. (Spring 1987)

"Writing Across the Curriculum" - Effort to teach students to write better and to use writing in every subject area as a way to learn. Professional development and planning have occurred in a collegial environment. To teach writing well, you must be a "writer." Description of summer institutes. What has been accomplished. (Fall 1987)

"Education for Employment/Cities-In-Schools" - A response to the 8000 students per year who leave school unprepared to hold a decent job. Education for Employment prepares students for the world of work. Cities-in-Schools coordinates delivery of human services to students in school buildings. Individual attention and caring bring positive response. (January 1988)

## An era ends for a voice on education

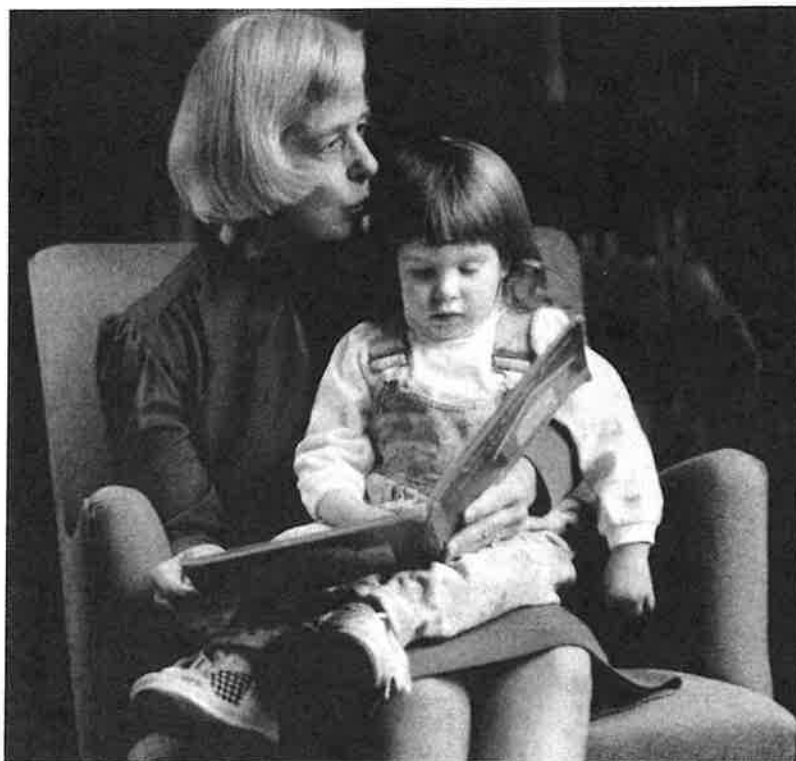
*Over 19 years, the Oakes Newsletter has come to be viewed as a one-of-a-kind record of an urban school system and its issues.*

By Dale Mezzacappa  
*Inquirer Staff Writer*

The prose was always simple and direct. Listen to an excerpt from the Oakes Newsletter of March 1984:

"High schools face enormous problems. Thousands of ill-prepared students are disinterested in their courses. They have poor attendance and cut classes. . . . Thousands of students have difficulty in concentrating on their studies because they must struggle with problems at home such as alcoholism, abusive adults, and poverty, or face hurdles such as pregnancy or drug dependence. High schools must endeavor to cope with all of these problems while pushing, cajoling, and encouraging pupils to learn."

Helen Oakes described her newsletter from its beginnings 19 years ago as "an independent monthly dedicated to improving public education." Every month — quarterly for the last few years — Oakes carefully researched an important educational issue and then presented her findings to the readership of her little



**Helen Oakes at home with her granddaughter Rebecca, 2.**

periodical.

But Oakes, 64, announced last week that her January newsletter, on the problems of new teachers and the looming teacher shortage, would be her last. She said that, after all this time, "it is time for me to pursue other interests."

With that decision, what some have described as a one-of-a-kind record of an urban school system's struggles and evolution came to an end.

"I think future generations are go-

ing to realize the Oakes Newsletter was a real treasure trove of insight over what happened in an urban school system over a long period of time," said Richard deLone, a former school district official and now an educational consultant. "I know nothing like it and I'm sorry it's gone."

(From a longer  
article.)