

the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.IX, No.1

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

September 20, 1977

A DEMORALIZING SUMMER AND STILL NO SOLUTION

After a long summer of uncertainty and the fear that public education might not be able to continue on a sound basis in Philadelphia, the various funding sources made their decisions and the Board of Education did the same. It is time to assess the damage done, the probable conditions under which public education will operate this year and the prospects for the future. Has a cruel, debilitating summer experience led to a resolution of the financial crisis for a period of time?

To understand the present situation, it is necessary to go back to last spring. The School District was facing a \$67 million deficit and it had to borrow \$31.5 million to stay open and finish the year. The banks agreed to loan the money on the condition that the Board of Education adopt a balanced budget for 1977-78, balanced either by cuts or guaranteed new revenue. Since there was no new revenue in sight, the Board was forced to pass a budget on May 31 of \$511 million — a drastic reduction of \$173 million from what the Superintendent had originally proposed. This budget funded a woefully inadequate level of education and meant that 10,000 employees had to be laid off. All kindergarten, counseling and library services were eliminated. Also out were alternative programs that met the needs of many children who did not fit into regular

programs. The paraprofessionals who enabled classroom teachers to individualize their program were slashed from the budget along with all extracurricular activities. The list of cuts was 47 pages long. That is where matters stood until the end of August.

Uncertainty marred the summer for many. Students in schools such as Parkway did not know whether their schools would reopen in September. Parents worried that schools would lack essential services. Principals were concerned that the learning environment and the physical environment of their schools would suffer badly, minus all that \$173 million would buy.

During July and August, the Legislature fought endlessly to hammer out a state budget which had been due by July 1, the beginning of the fiscal year. Finally on August 20, the budget passed, but Philadelphia's schools got a great deal less than had been hoped for. A new subsidy formula brought only \$20 million in new revenues and a \$30 million payment due the State was converted into a loan payable over a ten year period, reducing expenditures for one year only. Meanwhile, City Council discussed making a one-time gift of \$10 million to the schools and the Mayor promised a one-shot \$14 million of State funds that passed through City hands. Under the circumstances, the City's level of

support should have been increased by a much greater amount. [Later, under pressure from the banks, the Mayor also committed the City to \$20 million for each of the next two years (down from this year's \$24 million) and \$40 million the two years after that.]

The new City and State funds for 1977-78, totaling \$44 million, together with the \$30 million loan forgiveness, left a \$99 million gap. At that point, the banks abandoned their insistence on a budget balanced only with new revenue or cuts and proceeded to offer the schools a loan of \$50 million to be paid back over a five year period.

Now it was late August. The \$50 million loan reduced the budget gap to \$49 million and enabled the School District to restore \$124 million of the \$173 million which had been slashed from the budget in May. On August 31, the Board received the Superintendent's recommendations for reductions and restorations and approved them.

There were budget restorations which should not have been made that were and others that should have been made that were not. For example, 6 of the 11 school board chauffeurs were restored. Because board members should set an example of austerity, they should have remained cut. \$600,000 for driver education remains in the budget, stealing dollars that should be used for instruction in the three R's. Except for field trips, almost all transportation was restored. That means that once again, the School District will be providing unnecessary transportation to students in grades 7 and 8 and to many who live less than $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from school. This transportation which is neither State mandated nor reimbursable costs approximately \$1.3 million. The Superintendent cut only \$1 million from the money paid to the City for tax collection, a service ren-

dered inefficiently by patronage employees. Another \$1.7 million could be saved there. Many more examples could be given. (See back issues of The Oakes Newsletter.)

Examples of areas which should have been restored but were not are the reading aides who assist teachers and enable them to individualize their instruction and the alternative programs which often result in a better adjusted, happier student and/or higher achievement.

While there is absolutely no question that at least \$49 million had to be cut from the budget, it is equally certain that harm has been done to the schools. For example, almost half of the administrative assistants who aided principals in large elementary schools have been eliminated. Whatever responsibilities the principal had delegated to an assistant (e.g. lunch program, routine discipline) will now revert back to him. Something will get less attention and one likely area is classroom observation and teacher supervision. This will adversely affect the quality of teaching. Many secretaries were cut. That will undoubtedly mean that other personnel will be doing some secretarial work at the sacrifice of their own work. For example, one school that sends out 5000 transcripts annually lost its transcript secretary. Those transcripts will still have to be sent out and by someone on the counseling staff. This has to result in counselors having less time to work with students. Buildings will not be as clean, because the custodial staff has suffered severe cuts. It is very clear that the \$49 million cut from the budget is going to impose substantial sacrifices.

GOVERNED BY SENIORITY

Until the Board of Education made its decision on August 31,

just eight days before school opened for students, the reinstatement of about 7000 employees and the reassignment of many hundreds more could not begin. That was not nearly enough time to complete the complex process in an orderly, dignified way.

The method of staff reduction and restoration was prescribed by the School Code and depended almost solely on seniority in the system. In each teaching certification area, it was length of service in the School District that determined who was laid off and subsequently, who was reinstated. However when teachers and others with system seniority held positions eliminated by budget reductions, they were forced to transfer to other schools. Those with least seniority in a school in the given subject area or service were transferred out. For example, if a counseling staff was reduced from 8 to 6, the two counselors who had come to the school last were the ones who had to leave and be reassigned.

Reinstatement and reassignment involved a tremendous number of people. Many errors were made. Letters gave wrong dates for reporting for assignment. People reporting were asked to return on another day, because the Personnel Department's data contained so many errors that it could not be used until it was corrected. In many cases, teachers received their assignments, went to the designated school, found there was no opening for them and had to return and wait hours to be reassigned. Perhaps the greatest trauma was experienced by those who were reinstated and returned to work only to be laid off again when it was determined that too many had been recalled.

Under the best circumstances, the assignment process was more like an auction than the placement of a professional. Teachers in a

crowded, noisy room, having just received long lists of available schools, had their names called in order of seniority. Under great pressure to decide quickly and not delay the process, the teacher had to choose where he wished to be assigned. The established time line did not permit individuals to give careful consideration to this important decision and it gave the School District no opportunity to try to influence the matching of a school's requirements with an individual's strengths.

When school opened for students, many school staffs still had slots unfilled because the matching of people and openings was not completed. Principals, already reeling from a permanent loss of personnel and services had to cope with temporarily uncovered classes. To add to their problems, there are many teachers whose training qualifies them for their new assignments, but they are with age groups or in subject areas which they haven't taught in years, or perhaps never taught.

All of these circumstances and events have been demoralizing. Many School District employees, professionals and nonprofessionals alike, feel that the School Board, politicians and banks used them as pawns on a giant chess board. Thousands of people suffered for more than two months not knowing if they would, or would not, have a job in September. Hundreds of others, assured by seniority of a job, didn't know where it would be or what they would be teaching to whom. Many bear deep scars from the frustration and anxiety.

To look ahead is as painful as to look back. The lending institutions have said that their loan is predicated on balancing the budgets for the next five years allowing only a 7% increase in spending. Based on this year's \$605 million budget, next year's increase would provide \$42 million

more. It is already known, as shown in the following table, that the budget will increase much more than that next year

Estimated Increases In 1978-79 Budget

Vocational Education advance funding payback	\$ 36 million
Contracted salary increases	11 "
\$50 million "loan" payment	13 "
\$30 million Vocational Education forgiveness loan (interest free)	3 "
Salary increments	<u>8</u> "
	\$ 71 - \$ 42 = \$ 29

There will be a \$36 million increase in the Vocational Education payback which was largely removed from the budget this year. The substantial salary increases taking effect in the middle of this year must be paid for the full year in 1978-79. There are payments on the two "loans" to be made and the salary increments automatically granted each year to be allowed for. Other anticipated costs which can't be estimated now are increased employer social security payments, unemployment insurance and inflation. Adherence to the 7% requirement would mean that the School District would have to cut more than \$29 million from its budget next year, and depending on many things that scenario could be repeated in the following years.

This should have been the year to put this School District on a sound financial footing. Unfortunately, leadership, courage and the will to solve the problem were lacking in all quarters and this year's "solution", like all those before it, is no solution at all. The \$80 million in loans and deferred payments create an illusion of a balanced budget, but leave the School District to face more cuts of programs and services next spring or a renewed struggle for substantially more funding.

* * * * *

There are bright spots to dispel the gloom. At all levels and in all positions there are capable, dedicated women and men who will carry on against all odds because they are committed to educating the children of this City.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION
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Clarification - page 2, top of second column

Some of the alternative programs were restored, but two-thirds were not. All of them should have been.

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Vol.IX, No.2

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

October 18, 1977

COUNSELING - A VALUABLE SERVICE

When the school budget was drastically cut last spring, counseling was one of the services that was entirely eliminated. When the restorations were made in August, counseling was not fully restored. What will the effect be in the schools? Do counselors really make a difference? With their numbers reduced will there be a loss of essential services?

Counselors' duties and responsibilities are very varied. They help children to adjust to school and make the most of school opportunities. They aid students with personal problems originating in school or at home; assist students who are failing, truants or potential dropouts. Counselors serve as a liaison between the schools and outside agencies and organizations which provide various services to students.

A few examples of how counselors work with students may clarify what they do. John doesn't like kindergarten and cries every morning when he has to leave home. His mother is disturbed by the daily struggle and comes to the counselor for help. The counselor talks with John who expresses many fears and dislikes. The kindergarten is noisy. He doesn't like nap time or playing with strange boys and girls. He is afraid he will lose his coat, be hit by other children or worst of all get home and find his Mother isn't there. The counselor spends time with John helping him to face and overcome his

fears. One day John tells the counselor that the kindergarten isn't noisy anymore. Soon thereafter he says he'd rather be in kindergarten than in her office. A five-year-old has been helped to adjust to school and to the separation from his mother. He has had the support of an understanding adult and has a good base for a successful school experience.

Mary, a 13-year-old girl, is transferred for disciplinary reasons from one school to another. Placed in the 5th grade, she is with much younger children. Still smarting from her bad experience at her former school, she feels angry and hostile. Soon after her arrival the counselor calls Mary to her office, acknowledges her past school experience, but lets her know that she will get help here so she can be successful. Mary leaves the interview knowing that someone is interested in and cares about her. The counselor looks for a place where she can get Mary help with her basic skills. Since Mary has family problems, the counselor begins to work with her parents to help resolve them. If Mary can be helped to adjust, she will be happier and able to get more out of school. The investment of time now by a skilled professional will prevent further trouble and save time for everyone who would otherwise have to deal with Mary's continuing disruptive classroom behavior.

Paul, an 8th grader, is absent

from school. The teacher calls his home several times, but only gets vague excuses for Paul's continuing absence. Sensing a problem that the mother does not wish to discuss with her, Paul's teacher asks the counselor to call. The mother confides that Paul doesn't have proper clothing and she is afraid that the children will make fun of him. The counselor arranges for the needed clothing and Paul returns to school.

Martin has been attacked on the way to school by boys from another junior high school who took his books and jacket. He is hurt, humiliated and shattered. He must have attention at once. The teacher hears the story in sketchy form, but must start the English lesson. He sends Martin to his counselor who listens, understands and talks about what can be done to right this wrong. Martin returns to class obviously calmed and feeling better. The teacher has been able to do his teaching while an individual student's needs have been met.

Jane comes to her counselor to talk about the subjects she will take next year. She has been taking a college preparatory course, but finds the work difficult, has no plans to go to college, and wants to substitute art and bookkeeping for geometry and French II. Her counselor talks to her at length and urges her to keep her college option open. She can do the work if she applies herself. The counselor is determined and Jane finally agrees to stick with it for another year. Today, she has her law degree and is very grateful that her counselor did not let her choose the least demanding path at the end of 10th grade.

Sue, in trouble all through junior high, begins high school and her parents are notified that she is truant. They are very concerned and consult her counselor.

The counselor begins seeing Sue on a regular basis, checks on her attendance daily, and communicates frequently with her mother. The counselor is able to get Sue into an alternative program. When the new year begins, Sue spends part of each day working in a hospital. There is a transformation. Instead of disliking school, Sue is enthusiastic about everything she is doing. There is every reason to be hopeful that her future has been salvaged.

In all these cases, many benefits accrued. The individual students gained because counseling enhanced the likelihood that they would attend school regularly and be free to concentrate on learning. The school gained because teachers and students were spared the interruptions and delays caused by a distraught child or disruptive behavior. In addition, society as a whole will benefit. When students with problems get help, the chances are greatly increased that they will finish school prepared for a useful, productive life and will be taxpayers instead of consumers of tax supported services.

The examples cited sketch some of the responsibilities that counselors have, but there are many more. Some cases require counselor referral to other professionals such as psychologists or psychiatrists or to programs available in a mental health or drug clinic. The counselor works with the student, and his family whenever possible, so that the need for the referral is understood. Often it is not enough to simply give the parents the name of the nearest clinic. They must be helped to see, for example, how the child's emotional problems are interfering with his school work and how the clinic can serve the child. Unless the parents are motivated to seek help for their child, the referral is of little or no value.

Counselors must be familiar with the world of work so they can explain various job opportunities and career ladders in business and industry and help students make choices. They must also have a great deal of knowledge about higher education so they can assist students to decide on an educational institution and apply for entrance. Although students can be guided in groups about what to consider when deciding where they want to go to school, how to apply to take entrance tests, and where to seek financial aid, students have to work individually with a counselor to arrive at their final decision. Many students would never make it through the whole complex process without a counselor's interest and assistance.

THE BEGINNING OF COUNSELING

Contrary to what one might expect, the first counselors in Philadelphia's public schools were not public school employees. Counseling was pioneered here by the White-Williams Foundation, a private social agency almost two centuries old. Elementary school counseling began with the placement of a White-Williams Foundation counselor in a school in 1917. Secondary school counseling began the same way in 1921. The Board of Education was quickly persuaded of the value of counselors in secondary schools and in 1925 authorized principals in each secondary school to assign one teacher to counsel students. The White-Williams Foundation was asked to train these teachers.

White-Williams Foundation counselors, trained in education and social work, developed and tested counseling in a few widely-varying elementary schools in the 1920's. The Foundation expected that their demonstration would lead to the establishment of a School District elementary school counseling program which it did,

finally, in 1942. However, the Foundation had to keep the value of the service before the public all those years before it happened.

In Philadelphia, as elsewhere; counseling in elementary schools has not been valued as highly as counseling is for secondary schools. Secondary schools had two or more counselors for about twenty years before every elementary school had some service. Secondary school counselors had to be State certified, go through an examination procedure and be appointed from an eligibility list beginning in 1942. Elementary school counselors were not required to go through such an appointive process until the late 1960's, having been selected from the teaching ranks by principals and district superintendents and given in-service training prior to that time. Secondary school counselors are allocated on the basis of a pupil/counselor ratio which is still not the case for elementary schools. Although elementary school counselors are in a position to give early assistance to children and spare them the compounding of their problems, apparently the value of this preventive service is not sufficiently recognized.

BUDGET CUTS

The August budget document called for a reduction of thirteen counseling positions in the elementary schools. This was accomplished by eliminating the second counselor in the thirteen elementary schools that had them. Although there were great inequities in the allocation of counseling service before this cut, there is an even more grossly inequitable distribution now. There are about nineteen schools in the system with enrollments under 350 and about an equal number with enrollments over 1000. All now have one counselor. This is totally inde-

fensible and should be remedied at once. The smaller schools should share a counselor and the largest schools, or those with large populations and the greatest need, should share a second counselor.

Counseling allocations to the secondary schools were cut by 25% although the budget document called for only 13%. There is no satisfactory explanation for this. Last year, the allocation was based on one counselor for every 400 students. This year that was changed to one for every 500 students, a 25% reduction. Secondary counselors could not render proper service when their case load was 400. Now more students with problems who seek out a counselor will not get help because the counselor has other crises that demand attention or the long wait for an appointment is too discouraging. Many students who cause no trouble but still have serious problems will be neglected. Most students who need assistance in wisely selecting subjects, a post high school educational institution, or a career will get help that is less than adequate and much less than the counselor would like to give.

Counselors who care deeply about their work are enormously frustrated, because there is no way that they can stretch themselves to provide a quality service to the students assigned to them.

* * * * *

There are many very fine counselors in the school system who give very generously of themselves in the performance of a highly skilled professional job. There is no one else in the schools who has the time and the skills to render this service. It does make a tremendous difference when a little child's problem in school or with school is solved, or a potential dropout finds his niche in an alternative program, or a failing student receives encouragement and help and begins to pass. It is my hope that this Newsletter has shown that counselors who are well trained, well informed and care about those with whom they work, contribute in a highly significant way to their schools and the students whom they serve.

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Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

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November 16, 1977

BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT UNFIT

Teaching children to read was a top priority in the School District of Philadelphia from 1970 until last June. When the Superintendent cut the budget during the summer, reading instruction suffered a very damaging blow. The eight Reading Project Managers who headed up the reading program in the eight districts were eliminated along with 187 classroom reading aides. With them went a strong, cohesive reading program and the classroom teachers' ability to individualize instruction.

The Reading Project Managers were vital to the improvement of reading instruction in the eight districts for many reasons. First, the existence of their positions demonstrated that reading was a top priority. Second, the Managers provided strong, skillful leadership to the reading effort. Third, each Manager formed a team which included reading personnel, a researcher and the library specialist for the district. This resulted in a purposeful, coordinated effort with team members working cooperatively, each enhancing the work of everyone else. Fourth, under the Reading Project Managers, schools and districts developed annual reading plans. They provided a mechanism for full discussion and agreement on the objectives for a given year which was followed up by an examination of progress made and an evaluation upon which to base decisions for future action. Fifth, the teams

planned and carried out staff development so that district personnel were assisted to do a better job of teaching reading skills. Sixth, the Project Managers worked closely with a research specialist to develop various ways to monitor and evaluate progress in the district. Seventh, the Managers had the authority to require schools to make plans and carry them out. The planning, monitoring and evaluation of the reading effort made it much stronger and more effective. Clearly, this occurred because there were eight Reading Project Managers who formed teams in each district to focus hard on improving the teaching of reading.

The 187 eliminated reading aides were part-time employees who in the course of a morning worked with different teachers during their reading periods. This assistance enabled about 550 teachers to work on a more individualized basis with the 17,000 children in their classes. An aide in the classroom meant that the teacher could have more children working on different reading levels using a greater variety of materials. Because they had this help the teachers could tailor the program to more nearly meet the needs of each individual student.

The reading effort was further diminished by the elimination of 18 elementary school reading teachers. They were cut from 18 large schools that had two reading

teachers and were reduced to one. This causes gross inequities. It means that a small school has one reading teacher to work with 250 students and 8 teachers while a large school of 1000 has one reading teacher serving four times as many students and teachers. Five reading specialists were also eliminated. This reduced the School District's capability to help reading teachers and classroom teachers hone their skills and develop new or better ways of working with students.

Cutting the heart out of the reading effort led to equally devastating consequences for the people involved. Project Managers, reading personnel and others whose positions were eliminated got demotion letters. They said, in part, "the position you presently occupy has been eliminated as of June 30, 1977... You are entitled to reassignment... This reassignment will represent a demotion to you since there is no job available to you at your salary level or type of position. Unless you accept reassignment, your employment with the School District of Philadelphia will be suspended effective as of the 1977-78 fiscal year." These letters, dubbed "take it or leave" letters, came out of the blue. Their starkness and cruelty wreaked psychological havoc on those who received them.

There were people who had devoted years of their lives to the reading program. They had thought about it and worked to develop it days, nights and weekends. They had given their very best — way beyond what their jobs required. These professionals received NO expression of appreciation, no commendation from the Superintendent. There was no official recognition of their effort and achievement, only the demotion letter.

The emasculation of the reading program is one example of the very serious problem facing those

in Philadelphia concerned about public education. Education dollars which are in scarce supply are not being spent wisely. On the one hand, the Board of Education and the Superintendent eliminate or cripple vital and essential services. On the other hand, they continue to spend excessive amounts for non-instructional services and refuse to effect needed economies.

The Board has not closed non-fire resistant, underutilized schools to save salaries and operating costs. It has not eliminated its chauffeurs. It has not eliminated transportation for 7th and 8th graders and for children living between 1 and 1½ miles from school. The School District kept Get Set Centers open which with their undersized rooms could not accommodate the proper number of children. The resulting cost was \$5000 or more per child to be compared with \$3300 at other locations. These costly and inappropriate sites were not closed until July 1, 1977 when the State, which administers the 75% federal funding portion of the Get Set budget, refused to accept the bloated budget any longer. There are many other examples that could be given of savings that should have been made.

While the Superintendent and the Board did not cut what should be cut, they made dollar savings which have resulted in unwise use of personnel and reduced efficiency. Support personnel throughout the system have been reduced so that highly paid, competent professionals must often waste time delivering books to schools, typing reports or letters, monitoring lunchrooms, counting forms and answering phones. All of these chores take time from the job they should be doing and are paid well to do.

It is of the utmost importance that there be public confidence in

the spending side of the budget. Public education advocates cannot fight for full funding until the budget document is an outline for spending that reflects appropriate priorities, provides essential services at meaningful levels, and eliminates waste and non-essential spending. Based on past performance, there is no reason to think that the present Board of Education and Superintendent will ever produce a budget which warrants public confidence.

If there is to be widespread support for public education, the public must not only have confidence that the funds are being spent wisely, but must know that the huge outlay of dollars is producing results in the classrooms. Philadelphia students are registering significant gains. Results of standardized basic skills achievement tests given last February show continued improvement across the grades and the highest achievement levels since the tests were first given. Since May 1974, the percentage of students in grades 1-8 scoring at or above the national median (50th percentile) on the total battery has increased from 36% to 42% and the percentage in the same grades scoring below the 16th percentile has dropped from 28% to 22%. There is still a long ways to go to reach national norms and have 50% of the students above the 49th percentile and only 15% below the 16th, but the schools are moving toward that goal. Compared with May 1974, there were 9600 more students in 1977 in grades 1-8 scoring above the national median. That's the equivalent of moving the student bodies of ten large elementary schools into the higher scoring bracket. The same thing happened at the lower end. 9600 fewer students scored at the relatively low achievement level.

Kindergarten, grade 1 and grade 2 children do better than

children their age across the country. Instead of 50% of the children scoring above the 49th percentile, 70% of the kindergarten children, 59% of the first graders, and 57% of the second graders scored above it. At the other end of the performance range, instead of 15% of the students scoring below the 16th percentile, only 6% of the kindergarten, 8% of the grade 1 and 11% of the grade 2 children scored below it.

Another measure of student achievement is the functional literacy test. It was given to seniors in October 1976 and for the first time passing it was a requirement for graduation. 89% of the students passed. Those who failed were given help during the year and then retested. By June, 14,608 seniors had taken the test and 97% of them had passed. (Of the 3% who failed, many were chronic absentees and almost all had failed major subjects and were not eligible to graduate anyway.)

Students passing the literacy test have the basic skills they need for survival. They are able to fill out forms such as those required for a driver's license or a social security card. They can read and understand directions like those to be found on a medicine bottle, in a cookbook, or at the laundromat. They can read periodicals and newspapers and find information in the want ads or in other parts of the paper. They are similarly successful with job related materials, e.g. a piece written about safety on the job or a job description for a laboratory assistant. To complete all of these tasks, the students have to have a working vocabulary, the ability to understand simple adult material and to draw inferences from it, and the skill to follow directions.

The functional literacy testing proved that almost all students who stay in school through their senior year have at least the minimum

level of proficiency in reading needed for everyday living. Of course, students should have more than just survival skills. A much greater development of basic skills is needed to function as an intelligent citizen, to secure a job above the entry level, or to enjoy and profit from diversified reading materials.

* * * * *

Until this fall, there was every reason to be optimistic that achievement test scores would continue to improve and that almost all students would pass the functional literacy test. However, the instability and insecurity caused mainly by the budget crises, but aggravated by the strike of bus drivers and maintenance and custodial workers, have reduced staff and student morale precipi-

tously and made it very difficult to concentrate on teaching and learning. Almost surely future test results will reflect these conditions.

It is clearer now than ever before that the security and stability of the School District depend on the quality of direction and leadership given by the Board of Education and its Superintendent. What does or does not happen in the classrooms is inextricably joined with the budget and the way that the Board and the Superintendent accept their responsibility to balance and fund it. Tragically, in Philadelphia, the Board of Education and the Superintendent have proved to be unequal to this difficult task and the education of the children in the fourth largest city in the nation has been damaged.

The Oakes Newsletter would like to thank the READING PROJECT MANAGERS AND ALL OTHER READING PERSONNEL who have labored long, hard and well to bring about improvement in this basic skill in Philadelphia's school children. Your work has helped tens of thousands of students to read better. You are to be commended for the efforts you have made and for what you have achieved. I hope that, late as it is, the School District will recognize publicly the job that you did and the role that you played and that it will restore reading to a top priority.

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SPECIAL EDUCATION AND PUBLIC LAW 94-142

There are currently about 18,000 young people between the ages of 3 and 21 receiving special education services from the Philadelphia School District. If these students are to reach their potential, they must have education tailored to their individual needs. Some need special service because they are talented and gifted; others, because they are speech or orthopedically impaired, mentally retarded, hard of hearing or deaf, visually handicapped, emotionally disturbed or learning disabled.

Special education serves a broader range of handicaps today than in the past. Traditionally, in Philadelphia, classes were available to the majority of the retarded and those with physical handicaps or speech problems. There were very few classes for emotionally disturbed or learning disabled children. There were none for the severely and profoundly mentally retarded or for most children with severe multiple handicaps. Two suits played a large part in changing this. The first, brought in 1971 by the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children, resulted in a consent agreement that guaranteed all mentally retarded children in Pennsylvania regardless of the severity of their handicaps, free education and training. In Washington, D.C. an unrelated suit extended the guarantee to all school age children no matter what their handicap(s) or how severe. Legis-

latures in several states followed these precedents.

Today there is a Federal law, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142), which is changing special education significantly. This Law requires school districts to take steps which will overcome many of the abuses to which special education children and their parents have been subjected in the past. No longer can children be excluded from school on the grounds that they cannot learn or that their multiple handicaps pose too great a problem for the schools or that there is no suitable program available. P.L. 94-142 requires school districts to actively seek out handicapped children, publicize the availability of services, and provide appropriate placement for all.

Education for the handicapped is costly, especially for the seriously impaired who require the most individual attention. However, if they do not receive an education, they will have to be maintained at great expense by the taxpayers as dependents, some being forced into institutions. Given the proper education and training, many can become productive, tax paying citizens instead.

For those who ask how the Federal government can require school districts to educate all of their handicapped children when it does not fund the additional expense,

the answer comes from the Federal courts. The handicapped have a right to education protected by the Constitution of the United States. If there are not sufficient funds, then the available funds must be expended equitably. A funding shortage cannot be permitted to bear more heavily on the handicapped than on the normal child.

PROJECT PEACH

Funding under P.L. 94-142 permits Philadelphia to search for children younger than school age who have problems in hearing, seeing, talking, sleeping, playing or walking. Project PEACH, an acronym for Prescriptive Educational Approach for Children with Handicaps, seeks to reach parents in many ways to help them identify a child who may have a handicapping condition that could cause learning problems later on in school. All children, from birth to school age, who have problems that keep them from learning are eligible for service. Services include diagnosis by a team of experts; development of an individualized learning plan; prekindergarten therapeutic classes; therapy for children with speech, hearing or language problems; and training for parents so they can learn how to help their children at home. How wonderful that help is available to children early in life when there is the greatest opportunity to minimize the effect of a handicap, and in some cases to overcome it completely.

P.L. 94-142 will reduce the possibility of the incorrect labeling and placement of children which occurred in the past. For example, in 1974 in three school districts in Philadelphia, there were 24 elementary school children per thousand in classes for the "educable mentally retarded" while in another district there were only 6 per thousand. Such large

differences point to the likelihood of errors in the testing and classification of these children. In other parts of the nation, researchers found a disproportionate number of minority children assigned to special education classes. In response to this problem, Public Law 94-142 requires that testing materials must be selected and administered so as not to be racially or culturally discriminatory. In addition, the Law requires that there be more than one procedure used to determine the proper placement of a child. No longer can a psychologist perform a test and determine that a student belongs in a class for retarded children. The child must be assessed in several areas such as general intelligence, academic performance, physical and emotional health. The evaluation must be made by a group of people coming from different disciplines, including a teacher or other specialist in the field of the suspected disability.

Prior to P.L. 94-142, children, although properly identified, were often placed in programs that did not meet their needs. For example, there were no classes for emotionally disturbed, retarded students so such children had to be placed in a class planned to serve one handicap or the other, but not the combination. Consequently, P.L. 94-142 requires that all handicapped children must have a free appropriate public education available to them. The Law requires that an individualized education program (IEP) be written for every handicapped student defining what is appropriate for each one.

IEP

In Philadelphia, the individualized education program is developed in a meeting of, at a minimum, a School District representative (often the principal), the

teacher, the parents and, if appropriate, the student. The IEP, as required by law, must include a statement of how the student is performing now, a statement of annual goals, including short-term instructional objectives, the services to be provided and by what measures it is to be determined if the objectives are being achieved. The IEP must be completed before a child is placed in special education and it must be reviewed and, if necessary, revised at least once a year.

The IEP serves many purposes. It forces the schools to look at each child individually and develop a program that will best meet his needs. Recognizing that parents possess information about their children that is invaluable, it requires the schools to insure parent participation in the development of the IEP. It also requires the schools to give full consideration to the parents' judgement of what is best for their child by requiring parental approval before the IEP can be implemented.

DUE PROCESS

If the parents and school cannot agree on a program that is in the child's best interest, the principal holds an expanded conference to try to resolve the differences. If that fails, there is the formal due process hearing procedure outlined in the law. This involves an impartial hearing officer, legal counsel, and witnesses who may be examined and cross-examined. When the decision is rendered, either side may appeal to the State Department of Education for an impartial review of the hearing. After this second decision is rendered, either party may appeal through the courts. P.L. 94-142 gives parents the right to request the formal due process hearing procedure if they are dissatisfied or do not agree

with the identification, evaluation, or placement of their child or the appropriateness of the program being offered.

The requirement of P.L. 94-142 that all handicapped children be provided an appropriate education caused the creation of many new classes. Some of yesterday's classroom troublemakers are now assigned to classes for the emotionally disturbed. Many of yesterday's non-achieving, restless, fidgety students are identified today as learning disabled children who can be helped by the use of different methods and materials. In the last two years, Philadelphia has more than doubled the number of children being served in special education classes for the learning disabled or emotionally disturbed. This has required substantial staff increases. The School District has been able to find professionals with special education certification but that does not necessarily mean that these teachers have studied in depth the kind of exceptional children they are working with or had previous classroom experience with them. If these teachers are to do a good job, they must have specialized knowledge and skills.

It must be recognized by the School District and universities that there is a great need to train new people and to retrain professionals who are teaching in what are new areas for them. The School District has a solemn obligation to provide seminars and workshops for professionals and aides who need more information and guidance if they are to adequately serve the children assigned to them. The School District must also beef up its special education staff through retraining and substantial additions. There must be people to expand existing programs, aid and encourage the incorporation of promising new practices, and provide teachers

with the information, direction and help that they need.

Public Law 94-142 requires that "to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children", shall be educated "with children who are not handicapped, and that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily." This clause of P.L. 94-142 has profound implications. It can be successfully implemented only if teachers rise to the challenge. Historically, in all segments of society there has been a fear of and prejudice against those who seem to vary from the norm. It would be grossly unfair and damaging to handicapped children to place them in regular classrooms with teachers who do not understand and accept them and with children who will therefore lack the leadership and guidance they need to welcome the handi-

capped into their circle of friends.

We all need to feel good about who we are. So it is for children with cerebral palsy, the hard of hearing or those who learn with difficulty or more slowly than others. If these children are to be educated with non-handicapped children, serious attention must be given to their acceptance and assimilation by the group. Their educational experience must contribute to enhancing their self-image or at least not be damaging to it. Unless there is advance preparation and attitudinal changes on the part of regular classroom teachers, there is little chance that these exceptional children will have a constructive, happy experience.

P.L. 94-142 requires school districts to follow a course of action that promises a better education for handicapped children. However, before the promise can be fulfilled, the printed words must be converted by the minds and hearts of women and men into a fully prepared, committed staff and excellent programs.

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Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

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ABSENTEEISM, THE BUDGET AND THE CONTRACT

Absenteeism is costly for the School District of Philadelphia in two ways. It results in a reduction in the quality of service and an increase in the cost of running the schools. Some of the possible ways to cut down on absences would require contract changes. This Newsletter outlines the dimensions of the problem of absences of teachers and other employees. It discusses the intertwining of the budget and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers contract as both are affected by this problem and others.

The average percentage of absences of all professional staff members (other than principals and vice principals), for all reasons, was 7.3 for the School District last year. This means that on an average, in all the schools in the City last year, each teacher was out 14 of 190 days. When teachers are frequently out for a day or two, or for longer periods several times a year, the continuity of instruction is interrupted and students learn less. Moreover, substitute service is very costly. Last year's bill was \$10.7 million.

Obviously, like everyone else, teachers get sick, have illnesses in their families, need leave days to take care of pressing personal business, and have graduations and funerals to attend. However, the rate of absence of teachers indicates that many take days off for reasons that are not legitimate

ones.

The School Code requires the School District to provide ten days sick leave per year at full salary for absence due to personal illness. Unfortunately, many people feel they have a right to take those days off even though they are not sick and it is clearly understood that the days are only to be used for absences due to personal illness. Apparently, they don't view the practice of collecting sick pay when they are well as cheating or unethical.

The great majority of employees carry health insurance which, when sick leave days are exhausted, immediately takes over and provides payment of 75% of base salary for a period up to one year. Since this 75% payment is subject to little or no taxation, it is or comes close to being the equivalent of a regular salary check. There is, therefore, little if any economic penalty connected to use or abuse of sick leave.

No doctor's excuse is required for absences of three days or less but beyond that the employee must have a certificate signed by a physician. It is generally acknowledged that if requested many doctors will give their patients the necessary excuse for an absence whether or not the reason is legitimate. In an effort to reduce absences, the School District should write to all doctors who have recently signed certificates

explaining the abuse problem and its costs. The letter should serve notice that the medical division plans to spot-check absences by telephoning doctors to verify that it was their signature on the certificate, and to request more specific information about the employee under their professional care. It would be easier for doctors to say "no" to a patient's request for an excuse if they could explain that their refusal was the result of being subjected to pressure and questioning by the School District.

As bad as the attendance of the professional staff is, the non-professional staff's is worse. One example is the mechanics who service the School District's vehicles. According to the budget document, their absentee rate is 25%. Since they are absent one day out of four, the Transportation Division employs six extra mechanics at a cost of \$17,000 per year in salary and benefits for each man. In this case, the inexcusably high rate of absence costs the School District more than \$100,000 per year. This may not be the only case where a high absence rate leads to the employment of extra people and excessive cost.

Absenteeism is affected by staff morale. When morale is high and there is a team effort, there is more incentive to come to work. Unquestionably, this year morale is low. It has been hurt by last summer's lay-offs and the confusion that followed. Teachers who always believed that there was security in the profession do not see it there now.

The Board of Education's abdication of leadership in the major issues of the day — securing adequate funding, establishing priorities for spending and achieving desegregation — further reduce confidence in the system. This, coupled with the publicity about incidents which caused the Super-

intendent's and some Board Members' integrity to be called into question, brought a loss of pride in the system and another blow to morale.

There are many things that could be done to reduce excessive absences. Probably the most significant step would be to require a seven day waiting period between sick leave days and health insurance benefits. This is already in force for about 20% of the employees and should be extended to all. It means that when an employee's days of sick leave are used up, every time he's ill, he must wait seven days before the insurance benefits are payable. (Exceptions are made when an employee is hospitalized.)

Another way to reduce absences would be to seek legislation changing the School Code to require only seven days of sick leave a year at full salary instead of ten. This would reduce the cost of absenteeism by reducing its incidence.

Many principals could work more diligently to reduce absences. However, their job is made very difficult, because they have little chance to reward a good attendance record or to punish a poor one. They can't, as industry does, give bonuses, deny increases, hold back promotions, or lay people off for a period of time. It's even extremely difficult to give an unsatisfactory rating to a teacher whose "only" fault is absenteeism. What principals can do is make it clear to teachers that they are needed in their classrooms and that they are badly missed when they are not there. They can consistently call teachers and other employees in for conferences to try to ascertain the cause of the absences. In some instances, the principal can arrange for the employee to have a medical examination by a School District doctor. If all principals

kept after people in all ways available to them, they could be more effective in reducing absences.

If all of these steps were taken to reduce absenteeism, services would be improved and money saved. This would permit either a reduction in total expenditures or a reallocation of the savings.

THE BUDGET AND THE PHILADELPHIA FEDERATION OF TEACHERS CONTRACT

Under existing tight fiscal constraints, it is impossible to develop a budget and plan wisely for programs and personnel without knowing what the provisions of the teachers' contract will be. It is essential, therefore, that contract negotiations be completed in time to incorporate the results into the budget and get it balanced prior to its final adoption May 30.

The School District was forced to accept certain conditions when it negotiated a \$50 million loan from local lending institutions to cover operating expenses for 1977-78 and avert early closing of the schools. For each of the five years required to repay the loan, the School District must adopt a full year balanced budget and restrict its expenditure increase to 7% per pupil or less in any fiscal year. Those two conditions, applied to what is now known about next year's revenue and expenditures, add up to a need to cut millions of dollars from the budget.

— millions —

\$ 649	Revenue projected for 1978-79
\$ 625*	1977-78 expenditures
15	Contracted salary increases
12	Salary increments
14	\$50 million loan payment
3	\$30 million Vocational Education Forgiveness Loan payment
3	Approximate increase in cost of social security and unemployment insurance
6	Increase in vocational education advance funding payback
\$ 678	

The revenue estimate for next year is \$649 million. This is based on the yield of existing taxes and subsidies, plus the promised City contribution of \$20 million.

The same school services which cost \$625 million this year will cost millions of dollars more next year. A salary increase which became effective February 1 for school administrators and the 21,000 members of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers will be paid for half of this year, but will require \$15 million more to pay it for all of next year. Salary increments automatically granted annually to employees will add approximately \$12 million. \$17 million more will be required to cover loan payments. Social security and unemployment insurance will cost more. The increase in funds advanced by the State for vocational education will have to be paid back. There may be other unforeseeable and unavoidable increases. The total expenditures for 1978-79 come to at least \$678 million. That is \$29 million more than the projected revenue.

- * \$ 625 million - Cost of all programs for 1977-78 (based on latest budget revision)
- 30 million - Forgiveness by State of part of vocational education advance funding payback
- \$ 595 million - Remainder

The budget must be balanced by some combination of cuts and added revenue, but it must also fall within the 7% limit on increased expenditures. The banks state that 7% permits a reasonable increase from the prior year's level. It would appear to do so, but as they apply it, it does not. The lenders are considering the prior year's level to be an amount which does not include \$30 million for vocational education advance funding that the State permitted the School District to defer repaying. 7% applied to what remains gives a maximum expenditure total for next year of less than \$649 which is presently projected as the revenue. All of this is very complicated, confusing and hard to explain. It provides the lenders perfect camouflage for their demand for very substantial cuts in spending while they publicly claim to be allowing a 7% increase.

Based on all of these circumstances, the School District is asking the teachers' union to give up benefits won in the past. The request may be necessary, but it is unreasonable to ask the teachers' union alone to make sacrifices. Board members must give up their cars, chauffeurs and private secretaries. While the dollars saved would be small compared to the amount needed, Board mem-

bers would be making meaningful sacrifices to symbolize their determination to face the financial crisis and deal with it. They would then be in a position to ask others to follow their lead. Supervisors could be asked to go back to 10 month salaries instead of the recently negotiated eleven months of work and pay. Transportation for 7th and 8th grade students and all those living less than a mile and a half from school, toward which the State pays nothing, could be terminated. Teachers could be asked to give up extra-curricular hours added in 1976 and/or other contract terms that would result in reducing School District expenditures without reducing educational services.

The final answer may lie in reducing expenditures in many areas, such as absenteeism and others I have mentioned, while finding additional funds to cover the remainder of the budget gap. The contract should be settled this spring so that its impact on the budget is known and everyone can be confident that the schools will open normally in September. Then, there can be a pooling of effort to secure the needed funds and to negotiate with the lending institutions for a reasonable interpretation of the terms of the loan.

2/15/78

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Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

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NEEDED — LEADERSHIP AND ADEQUATE FUNDS

Late in 1977, two legislative bodies voted to undertake studies of the Philadelphia School District. City Council passed a resolution authorizing its president to convene the whole Council to investigate "the degree of cooperation between the City of Philadelphia and the Board of Education...; the magnitude of the financial and administrative problems facing the Board, and to determine the actions necessary to accomplish full cooperation and stability." The State House of Representatives passed a resolution calling for a comprehensive review of the fiscal and management practices of the School District.

The impetus for both studies was the School District's budget crises which have plagued City Council and the State Legislature annually since the late 1960's. The combined effects of salary increases, more employees, and inflation have caused the budget to come very close to tripling over this ten year period. Every year, there has been a search for large sums of new money. There have been frequent warnings that the schools would close for lack of funds. Council and the State Legislature have been pressed continually to provide more money.

In recent years, the School District has been accused of mismanaging its funds. It has added unnecessary expenditures, cut vital services, and refused to make

appropriate cuts.

It is no wonder that the governmental bodies that have to face School District budgets requiring tens of millions of new dollars annually are anxious to find ways to solve the problem. They yearn for a future free of escalating demands of the Philadelphia School District, educational offerings at a high enough level to still strident parental voices, and a school year that runs uninterrupted from September through June.

The first step towards resolving the school problem is a careful definition of what it really is. In reality, there are two problems that require solutions. First, the Board of Education has proved unequal to meeting the demands of leadership of the School District. Second, revenue has not kept up with increasing costs.

The current school board members, all appointed or reappointed to office by the present Mayor, make decisions and conduct themselves as if they had no understanding of the seriousness of the problems they face or the importance of developing solutions. The cost of running the system outpaces increases in revenue. Heavy criticism of unnecessary budgetary expenditures is leveled at the School District again and again. The system has been under a court order to desegregate for years and has failed to do so. The public perceives the schools as failing

even though test scores indicate otherwise.

The times call for board members who have a deep commitment to educating public school children. The School District needs women and men who will drive hard for appropriate funding, aid in developing a budget that is lean but serves students well, vigorously support desegregated schools philosophically and practically, inform the public of the school system's progress and achievement, and make proper policy decisions that further each of these goals.

The revenue sources for the School District have not increased at the rate that the budget has. The property tax, which is the major source of local funding, yields only slightly more each year. Because reassessment lags way behind changes in market value, the total assessed value of taxable real estate in Philadelphia has increased less than 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ % a year for the last four years. With dollars in short supply at all levels of government, Philadelphia's schools must compete with municipal services for City dollars and with other hard pressed cities and towns for State dollars.

PROPOSALS

Let us look briefly at some "solutions" that have been proposed. Do they solve either or both of the problems of leadership and inadequate financing?

City Council is calling for a change in the Educational Home Rule Charter which will give it the power "to approve, disapprove, or amend" the School District's budget. The change calls for a lump sum statement of expenditures for "each principal administrative unit" broken down into such categories as personal services, materials and supplies, and employee benefits. This would give Council the right to examine the budget in great detail and to

change it. It would transfer the power to make the policy decisions that flow from budget decisions from the Board of Education to Council. For example, Council could cut \$8 million from the budget and state that kindergarten, which is not mandated by the State should be eliminated from the schools. Since educators believe that the emphasis on kindergarten and other early childhood programs has led to the achievement of scores above the national average by Philadelphia children in the early grades, this would be a very significant educational policy decision. The power to make such decisions should be reserved for the Board of Education and it is the body which should be held accountable.

This charter change is being suggested because the Board of Education has done such a poor job of managing its budget. However, City Council has done an equally poor job with the City budget. On July 1, 1976, taxes collected for the City were increased by more than 30%. They were expected to produce \$180 million in new tax revenue which was needed to remove an \$82 million deficit carried over from the year before and to balance the City's budget. It was believed that with the deficit paid off, this enormous tax increase would produce a substantial surplus the following year. However the next year the Mayor recommended, and Council approved, a budget \$108 million higher. It included 520 additional employees and \$52 million in increased pay and employee benefits. The surplus was swallowed up and with it went any reduction in taxes. Since the City budget under the watchful eye of City Council consumed an \$82 million surplus in one year, it is hard to see why Council thinks it can manage the school system's budget better than the school board members.

The Charter currently requires

the Board of Education to "adopt and submit to the Mayor and Council a lump sum statement of anticipated receipts and expenditures for the next fiscal year and a request for authority to levy taxes to balance its budget for the year." Under this provision, Council may hold hearings on the budget. They may express opinions about the way that the money is being spent. They authorize the taxes to fund the budget in whatever amount they deem appropriate and possible which gives them the authority to limit the total amount to be spent. Therefore, Council already has all the power over the School District budget that is appropriate for them to have and this section of the Charter should not be changed.

Another "solution" being proposed is an elected school board. There would be serious problems connected with electing board members by district or at large. If board members ran from a geographic area, they would be expected to represent the interests of their specific constituencies, securing as much as possible for them. In a period of shortages, it would be very destructive to have board members competing with one another to secure a greater piece of the pie for their district. Under the present circumstances, geographical representation is not a factor and there is a much better chance that board members will work for what is in the best interests of all the students. If members were to run at large, it would be very difficult for the voters to know them well enough to make a wise choice. How many of us know who the councilmen at large are and what they stand for? So it would be with board members.

It has been suggested that the financial problems of the District could be solved by having an elected school board with taxing power. While an elected board could levy its own taxes to fund the schools,

they would still be paid by the same citizens who pay the highest taxes in the State of Pennsylvania to support the schools and the City at their present level. Clearly, an elected school board would not provide a solution to the financial problems of the School District, because it would have no way to secure more funds. Also, instead of one elected body — Council — deciding what taxes should be levied based on its judgment of the relative merits and importance of School District versus municipal expenditures, the Board of Education and City Council would be competing for the taxpayers' dollars. Each body would have its own set of priorities and goals. There would be no orderly way to determine how much should be collected from whom, or how the money should be spent to fund what would be in the best interests of the entire City.

Finally, another proposed solution is to make the school system a department of the City just as the police and fire departments are. The superintendent would serve in the mayor's cabinet. This proposal doesn't solve the finance or the leadership problem. It would neither create new revenue nor improve the capabilities and qualifications of board members. The schools would lose their independence and parents would lose their ability to impact on the decisions made for the schools. To make the school system a department of the City implies that the schools can be funded locally which they cannot be. Making the schools a City department runs completely counter to the best answer to the schools' financial problems — full State funding.

THE SOLUTIONS

Changes must be made in the ways that the schools are governed and financially supported if Philadelphia's school problems are to be solved. First, the Board of

Education must be composed of members dedicated to the public school children of Philadelphia and capable of overseeing the education of 250,000 students and the spending of more than \$600 million. Second, following a national trend toward full State funding, financial support for the schools must come from the State rather than the City.

There is nothing wrong with the existing method of school board selection as prescribed by the Charter. It could provide highly qualified school board members. The Educational Nominating Panel is appointed by the mayor and consists of four members from the citizenry at large and nine members who are officers of city-wide organizations or institutions described in the Charter. They could ably represent the public at large. The panel submits names to the mayor from which he must make his appointment(s). If it submits only qualified, capable candidates, there is no way that the mayor can make a poor appointment. This method can work very well if the mayor is sincerely interested in the welfare of the public school children and makes his appointments with that in mind. If that is not the case, then it is possible to manipulate this system to the detriment of the schools. However, since there is

no substitute that is likely to provide a higher quality of leadership, the answer is not to change the present system, but rather to make it work.

The answer to the annual financial crisis is full State funding supplemented in the near future with Federal funds. The State Constitution says that "The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth." This can certainly be interpreted to mean that the State should provide the necessary funds to provide a quality education for the State's children. Collecting the taxes statewide utilizes a broader base for support of schools, makes for greater equity, and is therefore a better system.

* * * * *

Each proposal for Charter or other change should be closely examined. Will the proposal provide the system with school board members who are qualified by interest, intelligence and diversity of background to lead the schools or will it provide adequate funds for the system? If a suggested change does not solve one or both of these problems, it should be rejected.

3/11/78

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Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

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April 1978

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BRIEF SUMMARY OF ISSUES

These summaries, listed in chronological order,
briefly describe the contents of each Newsletter.

"Index To The Oakes Newsletter" - Index by subject, April 1970 through March 1977, and a brief summary of each of the issues published during that seven year period. (April 22, 1977)

"The 1977 Fiscal Crisis" - A short year budget leads to a \$67 million deficit. Budget growth caused mainly by salary increases and more employees. Special education and vocational education not fully funded by State. Ways to cut the budget without reducing services to children. (May 11, 1977)

"Of Chess, Debating And The Budget" - Four inner city schools are public school champions, three in chess and one in debating. The path to victory of Vaux Jr. High, U.S. National Scholastic Chess Champion, is traced. Future opportunities to develop ability and talent gravely jeopardized by slashed budget. Board of Education responsible for chaos faced by school system. (June 10, 1977)

"A Demoralizing Summer And Still No Solution" - The \$173 million budget gap was closed by a combination of loans, cuts and new revenue. Staff reductions and restorations were made on the basis of seniority. The reinstatement of 7000 employees in the brief 8-day period before school opened led to many errors, further demoralizing the staff. Adherence to banks' 7% limit on spending would mean substantial cuts in next year's budget. (September 20, 1977)

"Counseling - A Valuable Service" - Counselors' duties and responsibilities outlined. Examples given of their work with students. How counseling began in Philadelphia schools. Budget cuts which reduce their number will adversely affect the important and valuable service counselors render. (October 18, 1977)

"Board And Superintendent Unfit" - Budget cuts which eliminated eight Reading Project Managers, 187 classroom reading aides and other reading personnel damaged the reading program. Board of Education and Superintendent responsible for spending scarce education dollars unwisely. Philadelphia students registering significant gains on achievement tests. Description of basic skills tested by functional literacy test which 97% of seniors passed. (November 16, 1977)

"Special Education And Public Law 94-142" - Education for All Handicapped Children Act requires appropriate placement for all handicapped children, development of individualized education program (IEP) for each one, and formal due process hearing to resolve differences between parents and school. Description of Project PEACH which seeks to help very young handicapped children. Need for more trained personnel. (January 16, 1978)

"Absenteeism, The Budget And The Contract" - Dimensions of problem of absences. Ways to reduce excessive absences. Necessity for completing contract negotiations well before May 30. Banks' requirement of full year balanced budget with expenditure increase held to 7% adds up to massive budget cuts. (February 20, 1978)

"Needed—Leadership And Adequate Funds" - Board of Education has not met demands of leadership and revenue has not kept up with increasing costs. Proposed solutions: Give City Council power to approve, disapprove or amend budget, elect school board, give an elected board taxing power, make the school system a department of the City. Real solution: Make present system of school board selection work and secure full State funding. (March 15, 1978)

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Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

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May 13, 1978

PUBLIC WANTS HIGHER ACHIEVEMENT AND LOWER COSTS

As the cost of public education increases each year, the public becomes more and more dissatisfied with what they view as the unsatisfactory results of the educational process. Too many students leave school or graduate without acquiring the basic skills that they need to survive. The significant drop in scores of students taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test for college entrance over a fourteen year period has caused great concern. Philadelphia, like the rest of the nation, faces these problems. They force us to examine both the classroom response to the lack of adequate achievement and the budgetary response to the constant push for more dollars.

School systems across the United States have responded to the public clamor caused by their students' lack of satisfactory achievement by developing "Back-To-Basics" schools, requiring students to meet minimum competency standards, and devoting more of the school day to reading, writing and arithmetic. Each of these responses has ardent supporters.

Philadelphia has substituted the term "Academics Plus" for what are called "Back-To-Basics" schools in other cities. Because basic skills have been strongly emphasized here since the early 1970's, the "back-to" would have been misleading. The "Academics Plus" schools provide what many parents want and consider impor-

tant for their children's development, that is, discipline, daily homework, a dress code and strong doses of the three R's.

The minimum competency standards will, hopefully, result in students receiving the remedial assistance that they need to develop their skills so that they are functionally literate, can pass tests and graduate. To survive in society, everyone must be able to fill out application forms, read directions on a bottle of medicine or understand written credit information. Let us all be very clear, however, that such limited facility permits existence, but that's about all. Functional literacy represents a minimum standard. Students must develop their skills much further to be adequately prepared to succeed in most occupations, at post high school educational institutions, or as a citizen required to judge candidates and complex issues.

The value of devoting more of the school day to teaching students the three R's depends on how they are taught. If the teaching of basic skills means teaching lessons which are reviewed and applied in all subjects, then if students spend more time on the basics they will learn more. For example, students are taught during reading to pick out the main idea in a series of paragraphs. Later, they should practice the skill by picking out the main

ideas in their social studies textbook and, on another occasion, they should apply the skill to a magazine article they are reading. In this way, students would see the usefulness of the skill and be given meaningful opportunities to practice it.

If basic skills teaching is limited to lessons from reading and mathematics books and workbooks, the use of prepared spelling lists and grammar drills, then the evidence suggests that more of the same will not help the students. Surprising as it may seem, basic skills lessons taught in isolation, separated out from other subjects, can appear to be learned by students yet go unapplied. A striking example is provided by Philadelphia students who get their highest scores on the California Achievement tests in the language sections which test their ability to punctuate, capitalize correctly, and to structure and use language properly. Great numbers of these same students write poorly and incorrectly proving they have not been taught to apply the knowledge the tests indicate they have acquired.

Another example of the same phenomenon was written up in a 1959 issue of the Harvard Educational Review. Harvard found that most of their freshmen students possessed the mechanical reading skills that they needed, but didn't apply them. In an unusual test, designed to determine their approach to typical college assignments, it was found that most freshmen read everything the same way. They started at the beginning of the chapter and proceeded to read straight through it. Many had been told in high school, again and again, to begin some assignments by surveying the chapter to determine its essence. Everything read after that fits into a framework and has meaning. However, they continued to utilize a poor, inefficient approach be-

cause they had not been required to use and practice this skill in high school assignments in their regular courses.

How to increase academic achievement is a difficult and challenging problem to which there is no single or simple solution. It seems clear, however, that if young people are to put forth the necessary effort to master the basic skills, they must know from their own experience that the skills are important and meaningful to them. Someone, a parent, teacher, or librarian, must help them to see that the printed page can be exciting. In books they can find adventure, life histories of fascinating people, legends to stir the imagination, and all of man's knowledge and thought. Students must be led to understand that their ideas are important and that through writing they can communicate their thoughts to people beyond the range of their voices. Young people must be shown how measurement and quantities and calculations have importance in their lives and in their studies. Too often, students see reading and writing as just sounding out words and learning spelling rules, sentence diagramming and verb agreement. Viewed this way, there is little incentive to learn the skills and not much reason to value them.

Students must be given many opportunities to read for fun, to look for information on subjects they are interested in, and to participate in meaningful written communication. Teachers, therefore, should be encouraged to involve their students in projects. Teachers should not be made to feel, as some do now, that time spent on a science project is time stolen from the three R's. To the contrary, what better way to reinforce the lessons on use of reference materials than to search for information in the library? What better way for students to learn

to organize their thoughts than to write a report to be made to the class?

A prestigious panel that studied the Scholastic Aptitude Test score decline, pinned part of the blame on the increased number of high school electives and their lack of rigorous basic skills requirements. Many high schools have been offering more electives and students may choose Science Fiction or Radio/TV/Film instead of traditional English courses. Often these electives demand less "critical reading" and less "careful writing". The panel points out, however, that the electives could be made as demanding as traditional courses. Since they are often of great interest to students they should be offered, but they should be beefed up. If students are to raise their SAT scores and the academic quality of their work, teachers, supported by administrators and parents, are going to have to develop higher standards and demand that students work harder to attain them.

THE BUDGET

Schools exist in a society that faces enormous problems which include racism, poverty, drug addiction, unemployment and broken homes. All of these impact on the schools making their job much more difficult. In addition, the schools face an annual budget crisis. It is true that because of inflation, debt charges, more employees and higher salaries, budgets have increased enormously. It is also true that budget cuts which bring long periods of indecision, trauma and worry coupled with substantial losses of services make it very much harder, if not impossible, to solve the educational problems faced by the schools. This is what Philadelphia schools are going through again now.

The Superintendent's budget

message of April 1, 1978 explained that \$698 million would be required next year to fund this year's level of activity. That represents a very substantial increase in costs attributable primarily to salary increases (resulting from the last contract), debt service and repayment of advance funding. It includes no new money for the Teachers' Contract now being negotiated. The Superintendent outlined \$61 million in cuts which would balance the budget by reducing it to the \$637 million in revenue which he believed on April 1 would be available for 1978-79. (Philadelphia is now threatened with the loss of \$14 million committed for this year which would reduce the money available to spend next year to \$623 million requiring further cuts in the budget.)

The Superintendent's list of reductions included a \$30 million figure which is savings that result from increasing class size and reducing teacher preparation time. Maximum class size, now 33 at all levels, would be increased to 37 in the elementary schools and 36 in junior high and middle schools. Preparation time would be reduced in elementary schools and junior high schools by 40% and 29% respectively. These proposed changes represent modifications of the present Teachers' Contract and immediately enmesh the budget with the negotiations.

The balance of the Superintendent's recommended \$61 million in cuts includes a 50% cut in municipal services; a reduction in health and transportation services; cuts in the several departments that build, clean, operate and maintain the schools; the closing of underutilized schools; a reduction in administrative and supervisory personnel; the reduction or elimination of some instructional services to students; and the elimination of extra curricular activities below high school and a

reduction at the high school level. These cuts would mean the elimination of almost 3000 positions.

While many of these cuts seem to be proper ones, there are others that clearly should be among the first to be made so that all duplication, overlap, waste and frills are eliminated. School Board members retain their offices, secretaries, cars and chauffeurs under the Superintendent's recommendations! All should be on the list for reduction or elimination. The cuts in municipal services, transportation and departments responsible for school buildings should be much larger. On the other hand, there are some cuts on the list that should not be made e.g., 67 secondary school counselors and the alternative programs.

It appears that from \$40 to \$48 million worth of cuts could be made without decimating the system or drastically affecting services to students providing that some modifications to the existing contract agreements were possible.

Going beyond that amount, which is what is presently planned, will be very damaging and will mean that almost everyone will find something gone that they value very highly.

There is a clear message coming from the taxpayers, City Council, the State Legislature and the lending institutions. The School District must reduce its spending. This process should have begun weeks ago with the passage of a Board of Education resolution eliminating the Board's drivers, cars and private secretaries. That would have properly set the stage for the other sacrifices that are going to be required. The School District must be able to convince Philadelphians and Pennsylvanians in general that waste and corruption have been eliminated and that neither salaries nor services are out of line with what is reasonable. Only then is there some chance to gain the broad support needed to secure the increase in funding from the City and/or the State that is so essential. 5/9/78

REMINDER

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Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

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ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS DESERVE SUPPORT

June 1978 is a sad time for the School District of Philadelphia. Budget cuts have devastated programs and eliminated many hundreds of jobs, depriving Philadelphia's public school children of many services that they need and deserve. The uncertainty that surrounds settlement of the expiring Teachers' Contract increases apprehension and tension. In spite of this depressing backdrop, we must not forget that there are many good things going on in the system that can give us pride in the present and hope for the future. Alternative programs fit into this category.

I recently visited WHGLE, more formally known as Prep 6, the District 6 alternative high school. The school was dubbed "WHGLE", pronounced "wiggle", back at its beginning in 1972 when the students rejected the formal name that had been chosen. The W,H,G, and L stand for the first letter of the last names of the teachers who founded the school and the "E" is for Everyone Else.

Classes are informal and take place in a casual setting. The staff acquired the furniture for Prep 6 where they could. It is more mix than match. Students of different ages and grades are in the same class. The classes are small and each student can actively participate in discussions. Students call their teachers by their first names. It jars the ears of a visitor at first, but it

contributes to informality and connotes no disrespect. To the contrary, it is very clear that teachers demand respect, receive it, and give it to the students.

Students have an opportunity four times a year to select what they will study, although there are limitations because they have to meet State requirements and Prep 6 performance requirements. They may choose from traditional subjects like geometry, chemistry and creative writing or they may choose from course offerings such as "Men, Mysteries, Monsters, and Myths" or "Consumer Education." Course selection at 10 week intervals avoids monotony and makes it possible for the students to start fresh frequently.

In mid-morning there is a break and it is chore time. The students do all the cleaning and each one is responsible for some area. When WHGLE moved to its present site in 1974, the students and staff cleaned, fixed up and painted the building. They feel it is theirs. They take pride in it and there is no graffiti to mar its appearance.

At Prep 6, everyone is expected to be present daily or, if absent, to call the school and explain. Phone calls are made each day to all those not accounted for as part of the staff's continuous effort to improve attendance. Average daily attendance last year was 89% compared with the average for all Philadelphia senior high

schools of 76%.

Perhaps the best way to characterize WHGLE is to quote from its yearbook. "We are the students of WHGLE. Our school is like no other because we are a part of it... We are self respecting and caring about the concerns of others... We are willing to share the joys that result from hard work and to accept disappointment when our dreams shatter... WHGLE helps each one of us to expand our ideas and dreams into reality... We are winners!... We are free..."

HARD TO DEFINE

If one defines an alternative program as that which provides students, parents and teachers with an option they voluntarily select, Philadelphia currently has more than 40. It is difficult to pin down just what an alternative is, because many completely different programs and/or schools fit the above definition, e.g., academic high schools, vocational-technical schools and open classrooms.

In 1972, a priority was given to developing alternative programs for alienated, secondary school youth. These students were bored, frustrated or unhappy in a standard school. Some manifested their feelings by being truant or disruptive or dropping out. In this group were able and not so able students, students who had good basic skills and those who did not, students with serious personal problems and students whose difficulties might evaporate in a different school setting.

Following the opening of many secondary alternative programs, attention was given to developing some for elementary students. Almost all of these alternatives were developed in an effort to meet what were seen as unmet individual interests and needs or to match differing teaching and learning styles. They serve students

of all levels of ability and achievement. Some parents choose them for their children because they believe in an educational style of learning which stresses individualization and independence. Some students transfer to them for the same reasons. Some students who are floundering are encouraged to enter them, because a new approach, a different focus, the size of the program or individualized instruction may make the difference.

Many of these alternatives have some common threads. They are small organizations with less than 200 students. The teachers know the students as individuals and have warm, often close relationships with them. There is a sense that teacher and student are working together to insure each student's success. Cooperation and sharing are encouraged more than competition. Students have some choices of what they will study. Classroom learning is supplemented by trips. Students have opportunities to work independently and to take responsibility for their own learning. In summary, the style and climate of learning are different from standard schools.

It is important to understand that while alternatives fill a need, their existence implies no criticism of standard schools. It is not that one is better than the other, but rather that each suits some students, parents and teachers. Take, for example, students in a large city high school of 3000. Bigness has its advantages. The large high school offers a great diversity of courses and school related activities. It can afford specialized and extensive equipment for courses in electronics, business machines or auto shop. There are enough students to support athletic teams, dramatics, debating, a school paper, choirs and an orchestra. Although bigness may lead to anonymity, there are students who can cope

with it. Many students like algebra, biology and English as they are traditionally taught. They either thrive on competition for grades or can disregard it sufficiently so that it doesn't affect them. They are aggressive and/or secure enough to enable them to make places for themselves. For the student who can succeed there, a big high school is a good place to be.

On the other hand, some students feel lost and alienated, viewing themselves as just numbers in a huge organization. Computers make up their rosters. Bells control their days. No one seems to know or care whether they are in school or how they are doing with their work. Attending an alternative school may make these students feel that they belong and that people care.

I visited several alternative schools in preparation for this Newsletter. Clearly, the teachers in these programs are dedicated and committed. Many come to school early, stay late and make a huge personal contribution to the program. Many teachers participate in the running of the school. In some schools, the teacher's role includes counseling and involves intense work with small groups of students to build esprit de corps. Many teachers, because they have their own approaches to learning and to specific subject matter, prepare their own materials instead of using a textbook. This is time consuming for the teachers, but they do it to make learning more interesting, thought provoking and challenging.

At one middle school, teachers develop outlines of the work for units of study so that students can work independently. The outline that I looked at on ancient Greece was divided into geography, people and Gods, life in ancient Greece and then a list of projects from which to choose, e.g., find

out what names from Greek myths were used in the space program and why each name was appropriate for a particular machine. The teacher listed under each heading in the outline what the students should learn and what reading or activities were either assigned or available to learn from. The teacher places everything the students will need, e.g., reference books, maps and pamphlets, in a designated spot, in a large room, where the independent work is done. Often, some of the materials have to be borrowed from personal and public libraries. Although this involves great effort and planning on the part of the teacher, it helps the students to become deeply involved in their work and develop research and study skills and learn to plan their time.

ALTERNATIVES CUT

When the School District budget was cut in May 1977, alternative programs were reduced from more than 100 to the present 40+. Support to the remaining alternative programs was reduced. Teachers in one program told me that they had used up all their reserves and now have to go begging even for pencils and paper. These teachers spent their own money to print a needed brochure.

The School District maintained when it cut the alternatives last year that they could not afford them. However, it is very difficult to determine what they really cost. In most, if not all, the ratio of pupils to adults is less than in a standard school, but some alternatives function without counselors, full time administrators, librarians, security personnel and many of the services found in standard schools. Some are in low cost buildings. At least one does its own cleaning. Therefore, some of the cost for additional personnel is offset by the lack of cost for other services.

Now, in June 1978, the School District faces a new budget crisis and again support to alternative programs is being reduced. Principals are talking of being forced to serve fewer students. Teachers in the alternative programs are wondering if their programs will exist next year or if they can carry them out if their resources are reduced still more. At the same time, the School District plans to spend several million dollars on its voluntary desegregation plan. While desegregated alternatives are being shrunk or forced to close, mostly for want of small amounts of money, the School District is planning to spend larger sums to open new, untried and untested magnet programs.

Prep 6 is a good example. Its future should be assured, because it is desegregated, its student population evenly divided, black and white. Yet its budget has been cut and it may be forced to serve fewer students under difficult or impossible conditions. For little additional cost, its staff and consequently its enrollment, could be maintained or increased. This would enable the black and white

Prep 6 students to continue to be educated in a situation that fosters mutual respect, friendship and understanding. To take dollars from this existing integrated program and invest them in an attempt to desegregate some other program is illogical, financially costly, educationally unsound and must not be allowed to happen. Alternative programs are an excellent tool for desegregation so their future should not be in jeopardy. Rather, they should be expanded as part of the desegregation plan.

* * * * *

Alternative programs, for some students and teachers, provide a classroom situation where they can be happier, derive more satisfaction and do a better job. For other students and parents, they offer an extremely important choice of an educational style that provides individualization and independence. For some students, they mean success instead of failure — a positive view of themselves, good attitudes toward learning and a sound educational foundation. On their merits, alternatives deserve to be valued and supported.

6/11/78

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