the OAKES newsletter

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

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HOW SHOULD TITLE I DOLLARS BE SPENT?

On August 9, 1973, Joseph S. Lord,III, a Federal Judge, ordered the State of Pennsylvania to withhold more than $25 million in Federal Title I funds from the School District of Philadelphia for the 1973-74 school year. Judge Lord's decision came as a result of a suit brought by the Philadelphia Welfare Rights Organization and low-income families against the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The Judge found that in previous years the School District had not complied with the law in the spending of Title I funds and he required that the 1973-74 application for funds be in compliance before the State approved and funded it.

Title I, the first section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed by the United States Congress in 1965, has financed many familiar programs in Philadelphia such as kindergarten and reading aides, the high school Motivation Program and school-community coordinators. Title I represented Congress's recognition of the relationship between low educational achievement and the cycle of poverty. It was designed to meet the special needs of educationally deprived children who attend schools that have a high concentration of children from families with very low incomes. Educationally deprived children are defined in the Federal regulations as "those children who have need for special educational assistance in order that their level of educational attainment may be raised to that appropriate for children of their age."

Title I provides grants to each state's education agency based on the number of poverty children residing in the state. That agency,in this case the Pennsylvania Department of Education, allocates the funds to eligible school districts. The agency is charged with the responsibility of examining the local Title I application to determine if it complies with the Title I requirements. If it does not, the state is not permitted to approve or fund it. Philadelphia's applications, as alleged in the suit, have not complied with Federal mandates, but the State has approved the applications and funded them anyway.

Why did the Philadelphia Welfare Rights Organization and the parents of low-income children, intended beneficiaries of Title I, bring an action which could have resulted in Philadelphia schools losing all Title I programs this year? They had tried, in all the ways open to them, to bring about changes in Title I spending without result. Finally, the lawsuit was, they believed,the only course left open. Their rationale was that the programs were so thinly spread and had produced such poor over-all results, so little improved basic skills achievement that little would be lost if the money was temporarily withheld.

TITLE I VIOLATIONS

The Welfare Rights Organization suit points to four categories of violations of Title I requirements -

1) Comparability. Local and state funds must provide comparable services in schools which receive Title I funds and in schools which do not. There are specific criteria to be met to achieve comparability. Each Title I school must have equal or lower student to staff ratios and equal or higher expenditures per pupil for instructional costs than the average Non-Title I school serving the same grade level. In last year's Title I application, according to the suit, there were 138 schools that violated the comparability criteria.

2) Supplanting. Title I funds may not be used to pay for services or programs in Title I schools that are being funded with local and state funds in Non-Title I schools. A supplanting violation would occur, for example, if local and state funds provided elementary school librarians in Non-Title I schools and Federal funds were used to provide the same professional service in Title I schools. Also, if services in Title I schools are extended to Non-Title I schools and paid for with local and state funds, the School District is required to assume full support of that service in all schools or it is guilty of a supplanting violation. The suit alleges that there have been supplanting violations and that the State has not required the information from the School District that would enable it to determine whether there had or had not been such violations.

3) Concentration. Federal law requires the State to determine that the grants "will be used for programs and projects...(A)which are designed to meet the special educational needs of educationally deprived children in school attendance areas having high concentrations of children from low-income families and (B)which are of sufficient size, scope and quality to give reasonable promise of substantial progress toward meeting those needs..."[20 U.S.Code, section 241e(a)(1)] Regulations stipulate that the needs of children in areas of the highest incidence of poverty should be met before considering the needs of children in areas where the incidence is much lower. This means that Title I programs in the areas of highest concentration should serve a larger proportion of children and provide them with a greater variety of services.

Expenditure per child is an indication of the concentration of effort and Federal guidelines recommend that the yearly investment per child should be about one-half the amount spent on the child's regular school program. To meet this guideline, Philadelphia would have had to spend $510 per Title I pupil last year. Instead the School District spent an average of $174 per child, signifying that its Title I funds were spread very thinly. The suit alleges, and the Judge found that the Philadelphia School District is not concentrating its Title I funds as required by statute and regulations.

It is important to note, however, that with available funds, concentration to secure results for the children being served would leave many other eligible children unserved. This problem is a severe one, because Congress has failed each year since 1966 to appropriate the amount of money necessary to even approach the Federal spending guidelines given above. It will require greatly increased public and legislative awareness to secure proper levels of appropriation.

4) Evaluations. Federal law requires "effective procedures,

including provision for appropriate objective measurements of educational achievement...for evaluating at least annually the effectiveness of the programs in meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children;" [20 U.S. Code, section 241e (a)(6)]

The suit alleges, as the Judge noted, that the State approves "Title I applications which fund documented ineffective programs and which do not have adequate information relating to the educational achievement of students."

45 SCHOOLS INELIGIBLE FOR TITLE I

There is some confusion about why 45 schools which were Title I schools last year are ineligible this year. Federal regulations require that a school must have a concentration of low-income children that is as high or higher than the average concentration in the school district as a whole. This percentage concentration figure is computed by the State and for Philadelphia for 1973-74 is 37.5%.

The 45 public schools which became ineligible were found to have a percentage of low-income children below 37.5%. There are two reasons for this change in eligibility, both unrelated to the court suit.

1) 37.5% is about 5% higher than last year's average concentration figure.

2) In prior years the concentration percentages were based on principals' estimates and subject to error, small and large. This year the percentages were calculated centrally and based on hard data.

The loss of Title I funds by the 45 schools is difficult for them to accept since it represents a loss of programs and personnel. However, since eligibility is Federally mandated, Title I status can not be restored. Their only recourse is for the staffs, parents, students and communities to join with others to work to secure adequate local and state funds that will provide a satisfactory basic educational program that meets the needs of all the children in all schools in the District.

ESSENCE OF TITLE I

Congress's intent in passing Title I is clearly indicated in the law and regulations. Schools with the highest incidence of low-income children are to have a priority for receiving programs designed to meet the educational needs of these children. The programs should be <u>in addition to</u> the regular school program and of "sufficient size,scope and quality to give reasonable promise of substantial progress toward meeting those needs." Once a school is designated a Title I school and a program is in the school, all educationally deprived children, regardless of income, are eligible for the program.

An examination of Philadelphia's Title I spending before the suit was brought shows that much of the above was not fulfilled. Schools with the highest percentages (80-98%) of low-income children did not have a priority on the funds. Many received only a fraction of what schools with lesser concentrations of low-income children received. Many received less than $225 per poverty child though there is evidence that $300 is the minimum necessary if there is to be a correlation between spending and increased educational achievement. Obviously, schools with these low expenditure levels could not have had programs of sufficient size, range and quality to give reasonable promise of substantial success.

The School District has had to

make many changes in response to the court suit. Comparability and supplanting violations are non-existent now according to the State. Programs are to be revised as well as methods of evaluation. The allocation of funds has been drastically changed.

The revised allocations will bring almost all Title I schools that received less than the minimum effective level of $300 last year up to at least that amount this year. This is possible because of a combination of circumstances, including the loss of the 45 schools from eligibility making those funds available for use elsewhere, and an increase in per pupil allotment from the Federal government which brings Philadelphia's Title I dollars up from $21 million to $27 million. Also, the School District expects to have an additional $3-$4 million that will go to provide a per pupil expenditure in excess of $300 for children attending schools with the highest concentrations of low-income children.

This new school-by-school allocation of funds has been completed, but there is a vast distance between a plan to increase spending and programs to meet the needs of children. Planning for the spending of the new dollars is just beginning. Since the issues involved in the suit were raised more than 1½ years ago, the School District should be severely criticized for failing to do the extensive contingency planning that would have enabled it to implement early this fall the revised programs that would meet both the needs of children and the requirements of the law.

School-by-school monitoring of the new plans and programs is essential if the public is to be assured that children's needs have been identified and met. This can be achieved if each Title I school family will insist on answers to the following questions:

*Have the educationally deprived children been identified? How many are there, at what grade levels?

*Have the priority needs of these children been determined?

*Have Title I programs been planned to meet these priority needs? Do they have clearly stated objectives? Are they extensive enough to produce substantial progress?

The School District's lengthy 1973-74 Title I application provides strong evidence that, as in the past, the emphasis is on programs and their placement in schools. This must be changed so that the stress is on the identification of the children with the greatest needs and the development of programs that meet these needs with a priority given to basic skills development.

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LAMBERTON AND ITS EFFECT ON THE SYSTEM

The Robert E. Lamberton School, located in District 4 of the Philadelphia Public School System, has a grade organization unique to the system. There are many schools that run from kindergarten through grade 8, but Lamberton is the only one that has added grades 9 and 10 and will run through grade 12 as of September 1975.

Like many schools, Lamberton has had great fluctuations in its school enrollment over the years. The school was built in 1949 as an elementary school (kindergarten through grade 6) to serve the surrounding community of Overbrook Park, a community of row homes that lies at the western border of the City. The school was filled to capacity and beyond for some years as it served the neighborhood children from this new community that had attracted many young, growing families. But by 1965 it was underutilized while nearby predominantly black schools were bulging at the seams. The School District began a city wide busing program to relieve overcrowding and integrate schools and black children were bused to Lamberton from four West Philadelphia schools. The school became desegregated for the first time, has averaged a one-third black enrollment since then and once again was fully utilized.

Up until 1970, Lamberton children graduated from 6th grade and went on to Beeber Jr. High School which is about two miles away in Wynnefield. In the six year period prior to 1970, Beeber's racial composition had changed from 79% white in 1963-64 to 80% black in 1969-70, a reflection of the decreased number of white children living in Beeber's feeder areas. During the latter part of this period, Lamberton parents were clamoring for the addition of grades 7 and 8 so that their children could remain at Lamberton two more years. In 1970, Beeber was seriously overcrowded and the Lamberton enrollment turned downward again. The School District then acceded to the parents' wishes and added the 7th grade, the following year the 8th grade and finally committed itself to the addition of a grade each year until the school runs through 12th grade in 1975-76.

WHY A SECONDARY SCHOOL?

In trying to analyze the wisdom of the decision to make Lamberton into a kindergarten through grade 12 school, one has to look beyond enrollment patterns, under utilization, and overcrowding. Why does the community want a secondary school? What kind of secondary school is being developed? Does it or does it not serve the best interests of the School District?

Why did the Lamberton parents press for their own secondary school? I think it would be fair and accurate to say that it was because they rejected the two

local secondary schools, Beeber Junior High School and Overbrook High School as appropriate educational institutions for their children. They were not motivated by a search for a new or different educational philosophy or method. The rejection of the two schools was on the basis of fear for the safety of their children and apprehension about the quality of the education offered.

Are these valid concerns? Both secondary schools are big city schools and no one can guarantee today that any student or adult will go without incident in any such school or for that matter in any part of a big city or a suburb either. But students I know have attended these schools happily and without fear. They have participated in extracurricular activities, graduated, and gone on to attend the colleges of their choice including some ranked as the most selective in the nation. I recognize that such experiences may not be universally applicable and that Lamberton parents, black and white, may have genuine concerns which merit consideration.

Some Lamberton parents have fears that arise from reality, but others have fears based in fantasy. Some of the apprehension about enrolling students in Beeber and Overbrook High School, which have enrollments greater than 90% black now, stems from race or class prejudice and misunderstanding. Many black parents join white parents in viewing Lamberton as a very high quality school that offers their children a good education and a safe environment. But many of their counterparts in the community deeply resent the addition of the secondary school because to them it represents prejudice and hostility toward the wider community and a rejection and downgrading of the other nearby secondary schools.

FOR ACADEMIC STUDENTS ONLY

When the parents succeeded in getting the commitment to the extension of the grades, what kind of school was developed? The senior high school, developed through 10th grade to date, is solely for college bound students and provides only an academic curriculum. It is referred to as an "alternative program", but it is not as that term is used elsewhere in the system. Alternative programs in Philadelphia have been designed to serve children who fail, cut classes, are truant or disruptive — those who cannot make it for one of many reasons in a regular classroom setting. Lamberton students in the college bound program do not fall into any of these categories.

Restricting the high school to students who want to go to college may, in the future, strongly influence the characteristics of the Lamberton student population. Prior to September 1973, the children admitted to Lamberton from outside its boundaries represented a broad range of intellectual ability. A cross section of children were bused from sending schools and those applying for a "special transfer" were accepted on the basis of the earliest request dates. The busing ended last June when the student population in the sending schools had decreased to such an extent that they were no longer overcrowded. (Many of the bused children have continued at Lamberton, using public transportation to get there.)

Currently, 45% of Lamberton's student body comes from outside its boundaries. With the end of busing, all of these admissions will be by "special transfer." Students will, therefore, be less representative of a cross section of the School District than they have been in the past. The process of the "special transfer" is it-

self selective because parents must initiate the process and this requires a certain amount of know-how. It will be further selective to the extent that the district superintendent approves the applicants who will be admitted on the basis of academic, attendance and behavior records instead of the date of application.

It has been publicly stated that students transferring into 9th grade or beyond must have achievement records demonstrating that they will fit into the academic program. They must also have records of good attendance and good behavior. Because students must meet these requirements, Lamberton's High School is an exclusive school which a neighborhood public school has no right to be.

This year for the first time according to the principal, Lamberton requested that 7th and 8th graders transferring to Lamberton be "average performers" and the school asked for a transcript of their record. Counselors and others in nearby schools with whom I spoke believe that these transferring students must have very high percentile ranks on standardized tests and excellent grades. One wonders what the admission criteria really are.

How far down into the grades will the requirement for high academic ability reach now that Lamberton has an all academic high school? Will they accept transfer students into the grades who might be unable to make it in Lamberton's high school or will they select only those students who seem to have a high potential? Only time will answer these questions, but the signs seem to point to a school that requires a certain academic achievement level for entering on a "special transfer."

In an interview, some parents of students described to me a number of the advantages that they see for their children in the Lamberton secondary school program. Contrasted with most, the school is small enough for the teachers to get to know all of the students. Students and teachers have a closer relationship and anonymity is not a problem. The students do not have to waste time traveling to other distant academic high schools. Parents feel close to the school, their children's program and the teachers in a way that they would not in a large secondary school. They have confidence that their children are getting a superior education, are safe and have no cause for apprehension in attending school. Parents are happy that Lamberton is a racially integrated school. Many of the students have been together for years, know each other well, and feel close to one another.

To this observer, the Lamberton students seem to be deprived of much that contributes to a balanced secondary school experience which can enrich a student's life and cultivate the diversification of his interests. In grades 7-9, they do not have the shop, sewing and cooking classes found in regular junior high schools. Students in grades 10-12 have no opportunity to participate in team sports or any other extracurricular activity such as a newspaper, literary magazine, choir, orchestra or jazz band nor do they have access to shops such as automotive, machine or electronic. The homogeneity of the student body in terms of aspirations, motivation and demonstrated scholastic ability prevents its students from coming to know, understand and respect other students who have different abilities and talents.

EFFECT ON OTHER SCHOOLS

How does the existence of Lamberton's secondary school affect other schools? Because

Lamberton is taking only academic students in its upper grades, it is siphoning off from other public schools a disproportionate number of able students. Comprehensive high schools need a certain number of academic students to continue to offer a diversity of courses, particularly the advanced courses that seniors may choose. They need their normal complement of able students to spark the school academically and to contribute to activities such as the yearbook or the debating team. Many elements contribute to pride in one's school — a winning cross country team, a popular singing group or a snappy drill team. A school's major mission, however, is education with staff and student pride depending to a large extent on the quality of what's being offered and the ability of the students to achieve. Any decrease in the number of academic students enrolled at Overbrook or any other public school because of Lamberton will be felt and will be detrimental to that school.

Having taken a hard look at Lamberton's new organization, it seems clear that the decision to add grades 7-12 was not in the School District's best interests. The administrators who supported the decision, and the Board of Education who had the ultimate responsibility for approving it, acquiesced to demands that would have been better refused. Similar demands, for the same reasons, could come from other parts of the City in the future. To avoid this, changes must be made in existing schools, Beeber and Overbrook in this case, so that all students in the community will benefit and all parents can have increased confidence in the safety of students attending these schools and in the schools' educational offerings.

Setting up another secondary school in response to parental dissatisfaction does a disservice to existing schools. It drains off much needed resources, energy and personnel — both lay and professional. It focuses drive and attention elsewhere making necessary improvements even more difficult to achieve. The District Superintendent, the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education should have given, and should be continuing to give, strong leadership and support to upgrading the quality of education at Beeber Junior High School and Overbrook High School. This would be the best way to satisfy the reasonable expectations of all students and parents.

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RETARDED CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION

In January 1971, the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children initiated a suit in federal court against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The suit resulted in a consent agreement guaranteeing all mentally retarded children in the State, regardless of the severity of their handicaps, a free, public program of education and training appropriate to their learning capacities.

Before this suit, the State School Code permitted children to be permanently excluded from public education if they were ascertained to be "uneducable and untrainable in the public schools." Many of these children grew up without learning to speak and without knowing how to feed, dress or otherwise care for themselves. The cost in human misery and family tribulation was incalculable.

Take Alice for example. Under the Right-To-Education decree, she entered school for the first time last January at the age of 10. She could not feed herself, walk or talk. She wouldn't work or play with any materials or toys. She screamed for long periods of time, refused to sit in a chair, and at home she frequently picked up objects and hurled them. Now, less than a year later, she uses a spoon to feed herself, walks unassisted, goes up and down stairs, says a few words, undresses herself and can put on some of her clothing. She doesn't scream or throw things anymore. Consider what this means to Alice, to her family and to society. She is developing her potential. She has already mastered some life skills so that she can care for many of her own needs. She is much easier to live with and her family has been relieved of some of the demanding responsibility for her care that they bore for so many years. If, someday, she has to live in an institution, she will not have to depend on overburdened staff members to meet many of her needs. For example, she will be able to eat her meals in the cafeteria. She won't have to wait for an attendant to finish feeding ten other people before getting to her. Anyone who has been confined to a bed in a hospital, totally dependent on other people for everything, can appreciate what it means to the Alices not to be in this position. In addition, the State will save many of the dollars that would otherwise have to be spent on her care. Because Alice is happier, others will respond to her in a more positive way which will, in turn, make her life more pleasant.

Experts testifying in this case indicated "that all mentally retarded persons are capable of benefiting from a program of education and training; that the greatest number of retarded persons, given such education and training, are capable of achieving self-sufficiency and the remaining few, with such education and train-

ing, are capable of achieving some degree of self-care..." While an early start is recommended, where education has been delayed, significant goals have been reached, even with adults.

Many children who a short time ago had no meaningful future ahead now are being helped to develop physically and mentally as far as they are able to go. I recently visited a class of severely retarded 4-6 year olds. A vital part of the learning process for this group of children is learning to speak. Not only do they have to develop the concepts of a ball or a baby so that the words have meaning, but they have to be helped to develop all of the muscles involved in forming sounds and words. It takes dedication, patience, training and skill to work with these children, but their progress provides a great reward.

Before the Right-To-Education decree, these children would have been denied access to public education. In their futures were institutions where many of them would have spent their lives sitting on a bench. Instead, their teacher expects them to be able to work when they are of age and live in a group home where they can receive minimal assistance or supervision. How much better to spend tax dollars now on education than to spend several thousand every year for a lifetime of institutional care.

In the past, public schools did not provide programs and did not accept severely retarded children, retarded children who were not toilet trained, retarded children with other handicaps such as a hearing loss or cerebral palsy, retarded children who could not walk or were behavior problems. Now Pennsylvania has what has been termed a zero-reject system. No retarded child, no matter what his handicaps or problems, may be denied the right to a free public program of education.

EARLY START RECOMMENDED

Every retarded child must be admitted to school at an early age if the parents wish to send him. Previously, some of the retarded children were discouraged from entering until they were eight years old,because it was felt that they were not ready for school until then. Because of this delay, some children became behavior problems which increased the difficulty of working with them. For all, time was lost that could have been productively used. Experts state that the earlier educational programs are introduced, the more responsive the child will be, the easier it is to achieve results and possibly for some, the more that can be achieved.

The decree provides that in school districts which offer an educational program to children under 6, classes must be open to retarded children of the same age. In Philadelphia, this means that schooling must be available for all retarded children who are 4 years and 7 months by September. Kindergarten is at least as important for the four or five year old retarded child as it is for the average child. It gives him the opportunity, for example, to learn to play and share with others, to develop his ability to listen, pay attention and communicate.

The consent decree stipulates that the compulsory attendance requirements of the School Code apply to retarded children too. Parents must place their retarded children in a school program from the age of 8 to the age of 17. They may decide for or against schooling of a student under 8 or over 17,but the School District is required to provide classes for those enrolled up to the age of 21.

The Right-To-Education decree

provides that it is the Commonwealth's obligation to place each mentally retarded child in an appropriate program based on the child's best interests and not the school district's convenience. It states that placement in a regular public school class is preferable to placement in a special education class and placement in a special education class is preferable to placement in another program such as a private facility or state hospital. Homebound instruction which must be at least 5 hours per week, is considered to be the "least preferable" program and assignment to it is restricted.

The decree provides for re-evaluation every two years of a student's placement in any eductional assignment other than a regular class and at a parent's request there must be an annual re-evaluation. The biennial re-evaluation requires teacher to keep records so that they will have data to indicate whether a child is making progress or not. This provision assures parents that their child will not just be placed in a program and forgotten.

THE DUE PROCESS HEARING

A parent, dissatisfied with the School District's proposed placement of his child upon his entry into the school system may request a due process hearing. This is a formal hearing, held before a hearing officer who comes from outside the district and whose decision can only be appealed through the courts. At the hearing I observed, the School District and the child were each represented by legal counsel. Each side's presentation included testimony by professionals who had examined or worked with the child. The hearing officer asked questions, listened for more than two hours, and rendered his written decision about two weeks later.

The due process hearing offers a much needed avenue of appeal to parents who are troubled and dissatisfied with their retarded child's placement and progress in school. For example, the parents of a child placed in a class of mildly retarded children because he is functioning at that level might feel he was incorrectly placed because little consideration had been given to his potential. While theoretically a class for retarded children should move each child along as fast as possible with placement into a class of average children a constant goal, it does not always work that way. Some teachers have low expectations for the children in their class. That forms the basis for their teaching and the students are not stimulated or challenged. A child placed in such a class may not achieve much. The availability of the due process hearing will undoubtedly force the School District to pay greater attention to parents' concerns about the appropriate placement of their children and provide a recourse for parents who believe their children are not progressing properly and want their placement changed.

Where public education has no appropriate placement for a particular retarded child with special handicaps, the State must now pay tuition, or tuition and maintenance, in a private licensed facility as it does for other exceptional children. Prior to the decree, astounding and horrifying as it seems, there was no provision made for the education of retarded children refused by the public schools. The School Code provided for the payment of tuition in approved institutions for children who were blind, deaf, afflicted with cerebral palsy and/or brain damage and/or muscular dystrophy or socially or emotionally disturbed, but not the retarded. It is shocking to know that our laws were so discriminatory.

The consent agreement which became final in May 1972, provided that all schools were to be ready by September 1, 1972 to receive the eligible children. Unfortunately, because of its serious financial problems which would have been temporarily aggravated by the agreement, the Philadelphia Board of Education did not authorize funds or make an attempt to meet the deadline. Very few of the approximately 1100 children in question were admitted before December 1972 and as of last month about 15% of the children were still not in school. The delay results from the late start in attempting to find and identify the children, form classes, find and prepare space, acquire and train staff and, perhaps, from an inadequate sense of urgency. The delay is especially tragic because lost time can have serious consequences for some of these children.

Prior to 1973-74, Philadelphia had to wait a year before it was reimbursed for its spending on special education. Money,however, is no longer the problem, because Philadelphia has been declared an Intermediate Unit for Special Education purposes. It now receives its funds from the State in the same year that the money is spent, based on a projected budget.

The consent agreement provides all retarded children in Pennsylvania with a right to education. This puts the Commonwealth out in front of other states and gives us something of which we can be justly proud. However, it is a long journey from the document to the Philadelphia classrooms. Along the road are the problems of too few teachers trained to work with severely retarded children and too many educators who plod along old paths, snuffing out with low expectations and dreary materials, the sparks of interest in learning that the retarded children have.

If the promise of the consent agreement is to be realized, there is much to be done. Those responsible for educating the retarded must have strong dynamic leadership. There must be team work among teachers, aides, parents, psychologists, supervisors, language therapists and others; extensive staff development and a strong will to provide the kind of education that will meet the needs of retarded children and help them to reach their highest potential.

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FIRST CLASS

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EDISON HIGH SCHOOL - A HISTORY OF BENIGN AND MALEVOLENT NEGLECT

The struggle to secure a site and build a replacement for Edison High School in District 5 has been a long and painful one. Edison students have received shabby and insensitive treatment since the very start of their school in 1957. To understand and judge what priority and urgency should be accorded the construction of a new Edison, you have to know the facts of Edison's beginnings.

Before the school was named Edison, it was a school for boys known as Northeast High School. It was built in 1903 and remained at 8th and Lehigh Avenue for 54 years. During the early 1950's, the community around the school began to change from white to black. On a day in February 1957, by which time the school had become half black, Northeast simply moved out of the building into a new $6,000,000 one on a 43-acre site in all white Northeast Philadelphia. When it left, it took the school's name, traditions, trophies, powerful alumni, all the money in the treasury, school colors and songs, sports records and two-thirds of its staff. The only thing left behind in the aging building was the students. The only thing they had that was new was the name, Thomas A. Edison High School.

Overnight, everything changed for these students who suddenly had no roots in the past. They were left to begin anew in a broken down building with substitutes to fill in for most of the two-thirds of the faculty who had departed. Morale was very low which made rebuilding the staff even more difficult.

What must those students have felt? The School District had flagrantly stripped them of their teachers and all that gave their school its special character and identity. None of us should forget this shameful beginning of Edison High School when we consider what should happen now.

DANGER OF FIRE

Edison is the oldest high school in the city and should be replaced immediately. It was built in 1903 before fire-resistant building materials and methods were used. With its wood lathe interior construction, wooden stairs and floors throughout, it is a combustible structure which poses a constant threat to the lives of its occupants. Should a fire occur, its spread would be rapid, the fumes noxious and if the building were occupied at the time, the consequences could be tragic.

The setting for Edison's instructional program is dirty, run down, uncomfortable, depressing and inadequate. There is broken plaster, exposed wood lath and peeling paint. The roof leaks. The toilet facilities in the building were described five years ago by the principal as "so bad they frequently nauseate passers-by. The odor is always offensive." They have not been improved. The building's heating system lacks effective controls and alternately

cooks and chills the occupants. There are no up-to-date physics, chemistry or biology laboratory facilities. A new school is desperately needed to provide Edison students with the modern facilities to which they are entitled.

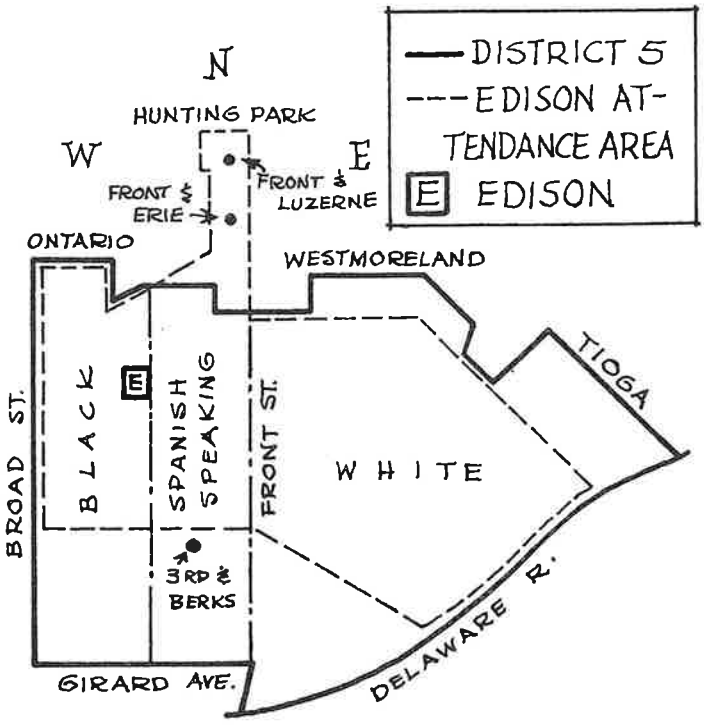
In the early 1960's, the Edison community was promised a new building soon. They are still waiting thirteen years later!

The most recent search for a site began in 1968. The joint effort of the School District and the community narrowed the choice to two sites within two blocks of each other. The first choice was Front and Luzerne, a 22.5 acre site being used in part for a Youth Development Center and owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The second was a 14.5 acre site two blocks south at Front and Erie. This area of the City, particularly around Front and Luzerne, is a prosperous, uncrowded, industrial-commercial area with wide streets. There are gas stations, low office and factory buildings on spacious, often landscaped sites.

In June 1970, it was learned that the State would not permit the new high school to locate at Front and Luzerne. Fourteen months later the Board of Education approved the Front and Erie site and architectural plans were developed. In August 1972, after some opposition had surfaced, the Mayor of Philadelphia, according to news accounts, protested the cost of the site and threatened that he would "surround the place with policemen before he let the school be built." That ended consideration of that site.

In the late fall of 1972, the Board initiated new discussions with the State Department of Welfare aimed at joint use of the site at Front and Luzerne. These discussions have continued over the last year but now, once again, there is organized opposition.

To understand and judge the



arguments for and against these sites, you have to know some unique facts about District 5 in which Edison is located. The heavy line on the map marks the boundaries of District 5. The district enrollment is 46% black, 22% Spanish speaking and 32% white. These different ethnic groups live in communities that can be roughly defined and appear on the map as corridors running north and south.

One of the major problems with the present Edison site is that racial hostility and gang activity in the area make getting there seem so frightening and dangerous that most white students refuse to attend. Even though public transportation takes students almost to the door, the white students are afraid of being attacked should they have to walk a few blocks through the community or should they find themselves alone, even close to the school. As a result, the school has become 79% black and 16% Spanish speaking.

Two of the important requirements, therefore, for a suitable site for a new Edison were reasonable assurance that the school

would be desegregated and, its companion provision, safety outside the school for all students. Both sites met these criteria. Students could travel safely through their own corridors on one of several trolley and bus lines and then travel east or west to school. Since both sites are in a gang-free,industrial-commercial area, the short distance to be traveled after leaving public transportation would be through a safe area free of racial hostility.

It is expected that safe travel routes to and from school combined with new facilities,a strong educational program, and an attractive site will lead to a desegregated high school. It is estimated that there is a potential white population in District 5 for the new Edison of about 1000. There are the white students living in District 5 who are now given the option of attending Frankford in District 7. There are those who flee to Mastbaum Vocational School even though they have no interest in its special offerings. And, finally, there are 400-500 white students annually who can't get into Frankford or Mastbaum and, rather than attend Edison, drop out and roam the streets of Kensington, Fishtown and Port Richmond. The new coeducational school should easily achieve a pupil population that is about 40% white, 40% black and 20% Spanish speaking.

OPPOSITION TO THE SITE

Current opposition to the Front and Luzerne location has come from residents and community organizations north, east and west of the site. A look at the map raises the question of how these communities could be affected by the new Edison. Students would be coming to school only from south of it and would not pass through these complaining communities at all. In addition, the residential areas are all separated from the school site for one to several blocks by a buffer of industrial and commercial properties and cemeteries.

A spokesperson for one opposing community group argues that their area is already congested with too many high schools. The claim is that there are 14,000 students commuting into a 20 block area. In reality, there are two public and two parochial high schools with 11,500 students situated on the periphery of a 280 square block area — a concentration of students no greater than many other areas. The same spokesperson expressed concern about increased vandalism as students, drawn to a high school practice field nearby, drift through residential communities. Since the field actually is .7 mile away and only soccor is practiced there, it seems unlikely that it will attract students. A final example of a reason given for opposing this site is that transportation is already overcrowded in the area. Clearly this is a problem that is easily solved by increasing bus and trolley service which has been done elsewhere under similar circumstances.

Fears have been expressed that gang and racial strife will come with Edison to the new site and infect the surrounding communities. It is most unlikely that there would be gang activity outside the school at Front and Luzerne, because it would be too dangerous for gang members. A group of students would be very conspicuous in this open, uncrowded area and if they were to cause trouble, they know there would be no way for them to escape being caught. There has been racial harmony in the Edison Project,an off site dropout prevention program with a good mix of black, white and Spanish speaking students which indicates these students can get along together under favorable circumstances. The evidence, therefore, is that gang problems would not recur at the

new Edison and that understanding and respect across racial lines could be an attainable goal at Front and Luzerne.

The City Planning Commission, whose members are appointed by the Mayor, opposes Front and Luzerne. Its opposition is partly based on its contention that locating a high school in an industrial area may endanger the industrial climate in the area. Can we accept from our city planning agency, the thinking that a comprehensive high school is incompatible with industry? If this were true, where should a high school be placed? The Planning Commission's suggested sites for Edison are in crowded, depressed, poverty areas of the city and are completely unacceptable.

Commission opposition also rests on the fact that this site is designated for industrial use in the City's Comprehensive Plan. This is true, but the 23 acres in question have been used for institutional purposes since 1908. In October 1963,three years after the Plan was completed, City Council passed an ordinance conveying the land to the Commonwealth for a Youth Development Center. The only condition of the conveyance was that the land be used solely for health, welfare or educational purposes. To imply that if Edison were not built,the land would then be available for industrial purposes is contrary to the facts.

The Commission also argues that Edison, built at Front and Luzerne, has little chance of being desegregated because of a changing neighborhood that will mean a decrease in the white population. The area referred to is not part of Edison's attendance area and would not affect it. In addition, the Commission's sincerity is thrown into question by its suggestion to locate the new Edison at 3rd and Berks, an area deep in gang territory that would pose the same obstacles to desegregation as Edison's present location.

The reasons given by those opposing this site fail to stand up to a test of their validity. That, together with the heat, hostility and pressure being generated by the opposition indicate that there are underlying reasons that are not being voiced publicly.

Considering the existing danger from fire, Edison's cruel beginning and its long struggle to secure a suitable site, there is a great urgency to reach an agreement with the Commonwealth so that building can begin at once at Front and Luzerne. If there is to be equity and justice, there must be a new Edison without further delay.

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PEACE AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL MY READERS

THE OAKES NEWSLETTER
6400 Drexel Road
Philadelphia, Pa. 19151

FIRST CLASS

the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.V, No.5 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania January 31, 1974

UNDER COURT ORDER TO SUBMIT DESEGREGATION PLAN

Hearings on a school desegregation plan have just been completed by the Philadelphia Board of Education. Because it lacked many elements that might have earned it thoughtful consideration and objective appraisal, the plan was almost totally rejected.

A sound plan would have included:

1.A strong statement of the Board of Education's commitment to school desegregation.

2.A proposal for educational improvements to be made at the same time desegregation is achieved.

3.A description of a comprehensive program for all staff members, preceding and accompanying desegregation, designed to help them promote constructive interracial experiences among students.

4.A carefully developed plan for transmitting to students new knowledge and understanding across racial and ethnic lines.

5.An outline for bringing black, white and Spanish speaking children together in as many schools as possible.

The Board of Education's "Proposed Desegregation Plan" drafted by School District staff members conforms to the Board's policy decisions and constraints. It addresses itself to only the last and most controversial element above — the physical desegregation of students. It does not even mention the others. It is no wonder that it aroused so much hostility and opposition.

The document begins with the argument that Philadelphia cannot correct racial imbalance because of its financial condition and the racial composition of its students. It points out that while Philadelphia's public school enrollment is 62% black, the adjoining districts are almost exclusively white. Therefore, the creation of a metropolitan school district, combining Philadelphia with its western and northern suburbs, is essential if racial balance is to be achieved. Placing much of the blame and responsibility on the State, it argues that the Department of Education and the Legislature have "created and imposed both racial and economic isolation, insulation and imbalance within this metropolitan area."

The document then discusses seven proposals for desegregation within the city limits such as: revising the present busing for overcrowding program so that more schools receiving students would be desegregated, closing ten non-fire resistant schools and redistributing their pupils to thirteen presently segregated fire resistant ones, and converting all senior high schools to city-wide magnet schools with pupils assigned to achieve racial balance. If all seven proposals were carried out, only 33% of Philadelphia's schools would be desegregated by 1976. One

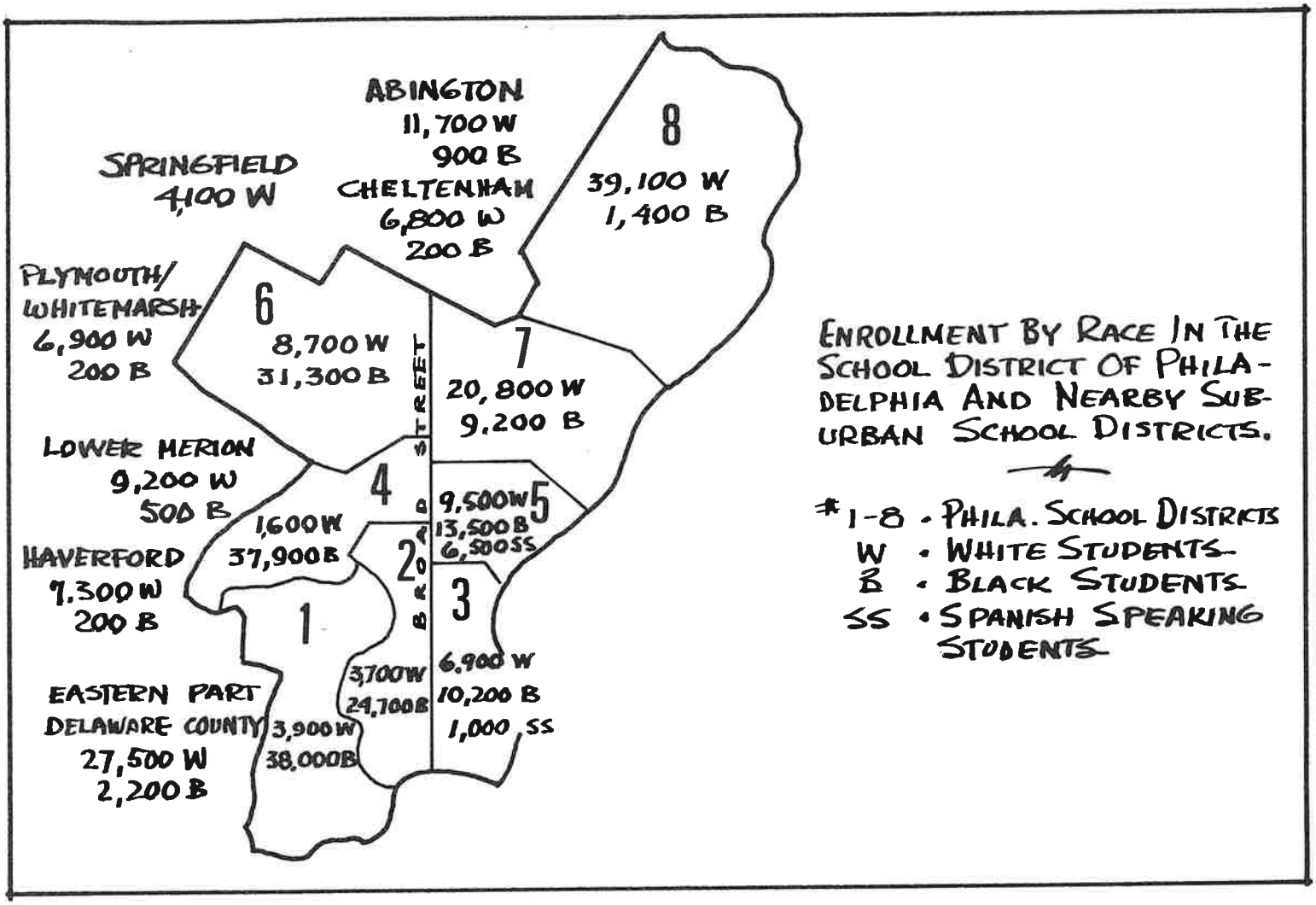
statistic is enough to give a measure of the racial isolation afflicting our schools now — about two-thirds of Philadelphia's schools are 85% or more of one race.

This desegregation plan is the most recent of many developed by the Board of Education in response to orders from the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission. Six years ago, in February 1968, the Commission first issued a mandate to the Philadelphia School District to prepare a plan to desegregate its schools. One was submitted in July 1969 and rejected because it resulted in minimal desegregation. In June 1971, the Commission ordered the School District "to eliminate racial imbalance" in its schools. The School District appealed this order in the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania and in August 1972, the Court rendered its opinion upholding the Commission's order. The Commission gave the Board of Education until January 1973 to produce a plan and when none was forthcoming, returned to Commonwealth Court. The result was a Court Order to the School District to submit a plan and timetable for implementation to the Human Relations Commission by February 15, 1974. Such is the sad history of the attempt to desegregate our public schools.

Why is school segregation such a serious problem that it warrants extensive changes in school attendance patterns, millions of dollars in additional spending and the temporary pain for many of difficult adjustments? Look around you and estimate the tremendous personal, social and economic costs of America's race problem. Racial division causes some people to live out their lives filled with hate, fear and guilt. For black children, segregation often means a lower self-image and less confidence, motivation and achievement in school. For white children, it often leads to the development of attitudes which hinder their ability to function effectively and comfortably in a pluralistic world. Since racial separation precludes the development of mutual understanding and respect, the racism that permeates and poisons our society persists. If the race problem is ever to be solved, and it must be, a logical place to begin is in schools with children.

How could schools in Philadelphia be desegregated? I would advocate desegregating as many schools as possible with the criterion that each school have no racial identification. It would be neither a black school nor a white one. The school population would be so evenly divided, one would have no sense that it was either white or black. Achieving this goal would do away with the school problems that result from either black or white students, as a result of desegregation, being in a small numerical minority in their school. Some of the problems faced by such students are their feelings of insecurity, possible oppression by the majority students, neglect of special wants and needs, and a serious disadvantage in competition for leadership roles of all kinds. Desegregated schools, with no racial identification, could grapple more successfully with intergroup relationships, because they would not be complicated by majority-minority problems.

People often attribute school segregation to residential patterns of separation of the races. However, in almost every part of this city there are black and white communities existing side by side. If all the children in the city went to public school, there would be no problem of segregation and most children could attend desegregated schools right in their own neighborhood. There are 120,000 parochial school students in Philadelphia of which 85-90% are white. In many areas



of the city where the public schools are predominantly or totally black, there are parochial schools predominantly or totally white nearby.

While a proportion of parents sincerely want their children to receive a religious education, others, through fear and distrust of the public system, place their children in parochial school. These schools, therefore, have some responsibility for the racial isolation existing today in public school. This should prick the conscience of Catholic laypeople and educators and motivate them to pursue programs which would bring children of both systems together in the classroom.

A look at the map and some rough calculations indicate that, working with only the city public school population, roughly half of Philadelphia's 273,000 students could attend schools desegregated on a non-racially identifiable basis — right now. It would not be possible to achieve total desegregation because there are not enough white public school students in the city. Also, in many cases, the black and white populations live so far apart it would not be possible to desegregate the schools and still observe reasonable time limitations on travel. However, in-city desegregation of as many schools as possible, each to be without racial identity, would serve about 140,000 students — a very significant advance over the existing situation.

This number could be increased to at least 230,000 city public school children if a metropolitan regional school system was formed.

This system would combine the city with western and northern suburbs. Those shown on the map are the suburbs which have white student populations living close enough to black city ones to make mutual desegregation practical. The public schools of these suburban communities averaging a 95% white population, would be desegregated. The interchange would desegregate the western portion of the city, Districts 1, 6 and the western half of 4,again on a non-racially identifiable basis. The total populations of the remaining districts are about evenly balanced racially. The portion of the city left would be sufficiently condensed, with distances between racial populations within reasonable limits so that desegregation could be accomplished with the possible exception of the most distant parts of District 8.

The Philadelphia Board of Education has made it very clear that they do not support the transportation of students on school buses for the purpose of school desegregation. At the same time they are urging the formation of a metropolitan school district for the entire area. There is no way that a metropolitan school district could solve the problem of segregation unless black city children were transported to the suburbs and white suburban children were transported to the city. Clearly, if the suburbs are to be required to interchange pupils with the city, many white and black city children will be required to attend schools within the city, but outside of their neighborhoods. It is a total contradiction to speak for a metropolitan school district and against the school bus. You cannot make the former function without the latter.

This Newsletter is written at this time, because it is my conviction that the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission is pressing Philadelphia to do what is in the best interests of all the residents of the city. The Board of Education should obey the Commonwealth Court Order and submit a comprehensive desegregation plan to the Commission. It should include an explanation of the way physical desegregation is to be accomplished, educational improvements that will be made and the ways that the experience will be made meaningful, important and valuable for students.

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the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.V, No.6 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania February 28, 1974

TEACHER ABSENCES AND SUBSTITUTES

Two years ago, there was a strong, centrally led effort to improve School District employee attendance and simultaneously upgrade substitute service. Published reports indicate that absences dropped significantly and more than $1 million in substitute service pay was saved. Unfortunately, this two-pronged effort was abandoned at the end of that year. In mid-February 1974, a year and a half later, the School District had not even gathered absence figures or substitute service costs for this year and compared them with other years. Persistent phone calls and much digging finally forced them to compile figures which reveal that the system-wide absence is higher this school year than during the same period in 1970 when there was great concern about absenteeism. The gap from 1970 to 1973 is caused by a lack of data for 1971 and the strike in 1972 which invalidates any comparisons. It is clear that the School District has a very serious problem to which it had addressed no attention whatever until inquiries were received from The Oakes Newsletter.

Of the 13,000 teachers in the Philadelphia public schools, from 200 to 800 are out of school each day. The range is so great because it reflects such things as the prevalence of contagious diseases, weather conditions and the factor of fatigue. When these teachers are out, 7,000 to 26,000 students come to class and find substitutes standing in for their regular teacher.

While absences due to accident or illness cannot be avoided, there is general recognition that sick leave is often abused by groups of employees of all kinds. Last month Albert Shanker, President of the United Federation of Teachers, New York City, wrote: "In times past most workers viewed sick leave time as time to be taken only for sickness: today there is widespread use of sick leave time for other purposes as well."

While there is no intent to single out teachers, it is their absences that are most costly to children, fellow staff members, and the School District's budget. Substitutes, particularly when they have a class for only a day or two, very often cannot pick up and continue from where the regular teacher left off. Sometimes substitutes can teach worthwhile lessons, sometimes they can just perform an efficient holding action and sometimes they cannot even keep the students quiet and calm. In most cases, at the very least, continuity of instruction is interrupted and students lose valuable instructional time.

A teacher's absence can adversely affect other teachers in the building. If the substitute teacher cannot control the class, the noise will be disturbing to students and teachers nearby. In a secondary school, students leaving such a substitute will

arrive at the next class in an excited state making it difficult for the teacher receiving them to settle them down so they can concentrate on their work. In some districts, it is often impossible to get substitutes for all classes. In those cases, in elementary schools, supportive service teachers such as art,music and physical education teachers have to take the class or other members of the staff have to take some of the children into their classrooms. In secondary schools, staff members may be asked to take a class during their preparation period.

Teachers' absences are costly in dollars too. In 1971-72, the year of the successful drive to reduce absences, $3.7 million was spent for substitute service. At the rate of spending so far this year, costs wil be up 20-25% over that amount.

IMPROVING ATTENDANCE

The drive begun two years ago to reduce absences was a very positive one. Signs were distributed throughout the system saying simply, "Think Attendance." Emphasis was placed on the importance of the contribution of each teacher to the education of his or her students. The principal, as the school leader, had primary responsibility for improving attendance.

Now, as then, if the principal can unify the staff and establish an esprit de corps, attendance can be affected positively. If the teachers know that the principal is aware of and appreciates what they are striving for in their classrooms, they will be inspired to come to work regularly. A principal who cares about the students and staff will want to know when and why people are absent, because of genuine concern for their welfare. In such a school there is motivation to be present every day. Each individual knows that what he is doing is important, appreciated and contributes to the successful operation of the school.

Principals have the difficult job of trying to identify and stop unnecessary absences. Incidental absences, a day here and there, particularly Mondays and non-payday Fridays call for investigation. Every unnecessary absence is needlessly damaging to students, but the absences must be excessive before the principal may officially warn the teacher that such absences can lead to an unsatisfactory rating or dismissal.

According to present personnel policy, teachers will have their tenure delayed, unless there are extenuating circumstances, if they have 26 or more absences during their two year probationary period. They are notified that their probationary period is being extended and their attendance during the next five months must improve if they wish to achieve tenure. This policy should be reexamined to give students greater protection against those who may improve their attendance for the five months and then are free to revert back to old patterns of numerous absences.

There is no economic deterrent to the misuse of sick leave and health insurance by School District employees. Under many other plans, the individual shares a little of the financial burden of absence which tends to discourage abuse. All School District employees have sick leave which entitles them to full salary for ten days each school year, cumulative,if unused, to an unlimited maximum. After these days have been exhausted, if the employee, and most do, has health insurance which is in reality salary insurance, he receives an amount equivalent to 75% of his salary for as long as the illness lasts provided it does not exceed one year. Employees collect benefits from the first day of absence and for each day even if the days are intermittent. No doctor's signature is required for an ab-

sence up to three days in length. Unlike most commercial plans, there is no waiting period prior to the collection of health insurance benefits. In addition, health insurance is not considered income for tax purposes and no federal, state, city or social security taxes are deducted from it. Therefore, for most employees 75% of salary gives them more dollars than their regular pay when they are working. All of this tends to encourage abuse and should certainly be modified so as to discourage it.

SUBSTITUTE SERVICE

Replacing absent teachers with good substitutes can be very difficult. This is particularly true if the school is located in a part of the city that is viewed by substitutes as an undesirable area. All schools have great difficulty on days when teacher absence is at its highest and the need for substitutes is greatest. Often the very conditions that keep teachers out — such as a flu epidemic or snow — subtract from the substitute pool also.

Since substitutes face job uncertainty, notification at 8: A.M. to report immediately, and work that can be frustrating and difficult, it is no wonder that it is hard to get enough competent substitutes. For many, the rate of pay is not much incentive either. A college graduate who is not certified by the state for teaching receives $23 per day. One who is certified receives $31.50.

Two approaches have been made to improving the quantity and quality of substitute service. The central effort two years ago was a drive to provide training and help to substitutes so that they would be better prepared for their job. For example, a 12-hour course in classroom management was offered on a voluntary basis. It was thought that by increasing the probability for competence and success, the number of people who stuck to substituting would be increased as well as the quality of their work.

Another way to upgrade substitute service is to utilize more auxiliary teachers. These are long term substitutes whose teaching has been judged satisfactory. They are assigned to a school, or a cluster of schools,for the whole year. If a district is having difficulty getting substitutes the guarantee of steady work, at $7900 to start plus teachers' benefits, will attract many who would not work in that district on an irregular basis.

Because auxiliary teachers work in one of the same schools each day, they get to know the students and are able to do a very much better job than the substitute who comes in as a stranger for a day or two. In a district with 40 auxiliary teachers, for example, no per diem substitutes have to be recruited on a given day until the number of absent teachers exceeds 40.

For many reasons, the School District should return to a centrally led effort to reduce absences and improve substitute service. If absences were reduced as they were two years ago, the incidence of students being instructed by substitutes would be reduced. Money would be saved and could be used to employ more auxiliary teachers and for staff development to further improve substitute service. If more substitutes received more support and were helped to develop their skills, the quality of instruction by substitutes could be increased. Money saved could also be used as an incentive for the districts to reduce their rate of absence. One suggestion has been that schools with the lowest absentee rates, having spent less for substitute service, should receive a small portion of the dollars saved for use as they see fit for their school.

To correctly analyze absenteeism and evaluate efforts to decrease its incidence, data must be centrally collected and interpreted system-wide. The School District has much of the data now, but it has not been extracted from the computers and analyzed. It doesn't know such things, therefore, as how much of the absentee rate is due to illnesses which are lengthy and what proportion to intermittent one or two day absences. You can't solve a problem until you define it and that remains to be done.

Only when there is central leadership will all of the eight districts meet together to work on the problems of absenteeism and substitute service. Each would gain from sharing ideas, information and programs, developing consistent policies and comparing means to success. Central leadership is essential to indicate to the whole school system that the Superintendent and the Board of Education consider these problems serious and important enough to merit concentration and priority.

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SCHOOL DISTRICT NEEDS NEW FUNDS FOR 1974-75

The School District expects to end this budget year on June 30, 1974 with its books balanced. However, when the School District unveils its budget for next year at the end of March, it will be clear that many millions of dollars in new funds will be needed to balance it. The Teachers' Contract alone requires $23 million in new money. An announcement of the substantial funds needed should have been made weeks ago to alert citizens and legislators alike.

NOTICE

The subscription rate for The Oakes Newsletter has remained at $3.00 since the first issue in April 1970 when it was mailed first class for 6¢. All newsletter costs have increased and although I deeply regret it, it is essential to raise the cost of a subscription to $4.00 per year as of March 1, 1974.

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the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.V, No.7 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania March 31, 1974

INSTRUCTION MUST CONTINUE UNTIL YEAR ENDS

For many years, high school students have lost valuable classroom time in June. Instruction slows to a stop because final marks are computed and recorded well before the end of the school year. Since 1964, report cards have been made up by the computer and grades recorded 1½ to 3 weeks before the end of the high school year. It takes this much time to process the data for the computer and for it to produce the reports. When the grades are set, most students, motivated by a desire to get good marks or just pass, lose interest in school. Some teachers lose their incentive, reduce their pace, abandon homework and tests and grind to a halt. Even conscientious, dedicated teachers find it extremely difficult to continue a meaningful program in the face of the premature demand for final grades, the resulting student disinterest and the indifference of some of their colleagues.

A strong case can be made for students studying in order to learn and not just for grades. Some students in some classrooms are so motivated. Unfortunately, such values are not taught or lived in most of the school system or in most homes. Such a philosophy would have to be practiced all year long in order to have it apply at the end of the year.

Many students simply stay home after the grades are final. Those who do come to school find themselves overcome with boredom, sitting for days doing nothing. It is a demoralizing situation — a sham. The lesson implicit in the emptiness and worthlessness of these last school days is corrupting. This practice is totally indefensible and inexcusable and should have been stopped long ago.

High school students are already about eighty hours short of the 990 hours of instruction mandated by state law. There is no way to justify the sacrifice of one to two weeks of instructional time — 3% to 5% of the whole year — to meet the demands of a machine.

There is an accompanying dollar waste too. High school teachers average well in excess of $70 per teaching day. When the School District causes time to be lost, a very substantial number of taxpayers' dollars are spent for nothing.

The Oakes Newsletter has spearheaded a drive to solve this problem. In the spring of 1973, it was brought to the attention of a high administration official. Though he proposed no fundamental change in procedure from previous years, which should have been a tip-off, he made several promises. He gave assurances that instruction would continue up to the very end of the year, with the collection of textbooks deferred "as long as possible." He stated that students would continue to work after grades went in, because

teachers could change grades after they were recorded if a student's work improved or deteriorated.

Unfortunately, as early as the end of May, many textbooks had already been collected, homework was no longer being assigned in many courses and some teachers had already stopped teaching. The matter was then brought to the attention of the Superintendent. He wrote a strong memorandum to principals directing that every effort be made to continue formal instruction until the last possible moment. However, he did not deal with the primary cause of the problem. He did not order the schools to stop using the computer for report cards nor did he insist on a substantial delay in the collection of final grades. Therefore, his admonishment was in vain.

In recording data for the computer, each teacher has to fill in hundreds of tiny circles with heavy dark marks for a scanning machine to read. The rating sheets are then checked for accuracy and completeness by other high school personnel. The whole process consumes several days. Some schools allow as many as ten days from the time that teachers receive the rating forms until they are due at the Administration Building. Competing with the payroll for computer time, another week must be allowed to produce the report cards.

Once teachers turn in final grades, students assume that the regular instructional program is over. Very shortly thereafter, these assumptions become a concrete reality. The early collection of textbooks, ostensibly to prevent loss, gives students furthere evidence that their classes and studies are at an end.

BOREDOM SETS IN

In high schools all over the city last June, students played games, talked and killed time for days and days. This seemed especially deplorable because it came on top of 54 days of school lost because of strikes. The absolute necessity for a system wide change this year was brought to the Superintendent's attention in October 1973 and again in February 1974. Finally, action has been taken. A plan has been drafted by Field Operations for maintaining a full instructional program at all levels to the end of school. It specifies when marks may be entered. It prohibits the collection of textbooks more than three days before the end of school.

The plan postpones calculating and entering grades for 10th and 11th graders until June 25, the day after the students' last day in school. The report cards will then be prepared by the computer and mailed to parents in early July.

A plan similar to this was tried at Edison High School last year. From Memorial Day on, the principal and the staff stressed over and over again to students that instruction would continue until the end of the year and that students could influence their grades either way, right up to the end. It took great effort to convince students, but teachers at Edison felt that students worked two or three weeks longer last year than previously.

An alternative to mailing out report cards after the close of school would be to make up report cards by hand as was done prior to the use of the computer. It took only a short time to do. Students were dismissed at noon one day and they returned about 24 hours later to pick up their report cards. That meant that a regular instructional program could be carried on through the last day of school for students. While I have talked to only a few teachers, all expressed a desire to abandon the computer, as it has been used to date, and a willingness to return to the system of entering grades by hand.

1973

	May		June			
Mon.	21	28	4	11	18	25
Tues.	22	29	5	12	19	26
Wed.	23	30	6	13	20	27
Thurs.	24	31	7	14	21	28
Fri.	25	1	8	15	22	

1974

	May	June			
Mon.		3	10	17	24
Tues.		4	11	18	
Wed.		5	12	19	
Thurs.	30	6	13	20	
Fri.	31	7	14	21	

Seniors are a special problem and the new Field Operations' plan does not offer nearly enough improvement for them. Schools need grades for each senior far enough ahead of time to determine who has enough credits to graduate and who will be cited at graduation for the quality of their high school academic work. They need the information to notify students if they are not going to graduate, print programs and determine who will win the various prizes and awards that the school gives at commencement.

In 1973, schools were required to begin compiling grades for seniors on May 21, 3½ weeks before the first high school graduation and five weeks before the last one. (See calendar above.) Instruction stopped soon after May 21 in some schools, but continued into June in seniors' classes in other schools. However, even if classes continue, it is generally acknowledged that there is a general letdown of effort and drive as soon as grades are sent in.

The plan for this year requires that marks be recorded on May 30, more than two weeks before June 17, the earliest date on which a commencement may be held. This recording could be delayed at least another week if the School District were to break away from the traditional practice of announcing School District scholarship and grant winners at graduation. In order to determine who will receive these awards, the Field Operations' Office needs the schools' recommendations by June 10 and that requirement determines the May 30 recording date.

Field Operations needs at least a week to determine the winners of more than 150 scholarships. In the past this was done in time for announcement by the first commencement. Without this deadline, grades could be entered at the end of the first week in June. This could be further delayed if the graduation of the particular school came after June 17 which many will do since the 25 commencements are scheduled on different days between June 17 and June 21. I would agree that it is nice to be able to announce the two to twenty-seven students in each school receiving these scholarships at commencement time. However, it is not worth the loss of a week to two weeks of instruction for every senior in the city. I would strongly recommend that the announcements be abandoned and the recording of grades delayed at least to June 6. Individuals receiving the scholarship and grant awards should be individually notified and a press release announcing the winners could be sent to the newspapers.

Experienced administrators and teachers point out that there are other problems involved in sustaining student interest through the month of June. Students are distracted by the balmy weather which invites them outside or the hot weather that makes classrooms uncomfortable or students in other school systems that are out of school already. Even when the recording of marks is delayed to the

very end of the year, there will still be a necessity to use ingenuity and resourcefulness to spark up the material to be presented in June so that student interest can be captured and held.

The School District receives a large proportion of its budget from the State in the form of a subsidy. The State Department of Education told me that it would investigate complaints brought to it of classes or schools where instruction is halted prematurely, should that happen this year. The subsidy is provided as support for the instructional program, so if instruction stops before the end of the school year at one or more locations, the state subsidy should be reduced proportionally. The possibility of the loss of state funds should provide added incentive to total reform this year.

* * * * * * *

In an interview with The Oakes Newsletter, Dr. Matthew Costanzo, School Superintendent, stated his personal commitment to the continuation of instruction until students are dismissed in June. The plan for providing instruction until the end of the year has gone out to schools in the form of a directive and Dr. Constanzo stated that any principal unable or unwilling to carry out this mandate will be disciplined.

I believe that the Superintendent is doing his job as an educational leader by setting a system-wide standard requiring school personnel to fulfill their teaching role for the full school year. Teachers of all elementary and secondary school students have a responsibility to give students high quality instruction as long as school is officially in session. Administrators have an obligation to see that this happens.

It is appropriate and proper for the central administration to require the delay of the determination of final grades, the collection of textbooks and the holding of high school graduations until certain specific dates. Parents in every corner of the school system have the right to expect and secure a full instructional program for their children. Students have a right to classroom instruction that warrants their presence when they are required to attend school. I believe that the central administration has the responsibility for issuing guidelines that will guarantee this and for monitoring the system so see that these guidelines are followed.

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the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.V, No.8 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania April 29, 1974

INDEX TO THE OAKES NEWSLETTER

Brief Summary Of Issues - April 1970 thru March 1974

These summaries are designed to help you locate a past Newsletter on a particular topic. They are listed in chronological order beginning with April 1970, the first issue.

The Philadelphia School District's Budget - Cuts; the deficit and how it accumulated; why the budget increases annually; need for City,State and Federal support; necessity to place priority on improved reading instruction. (April 1970)

"Reading" - What skills the term includes. The reading deficiency of Philadelphia's school children. Necessity to place priority on teaching of reading and to improve existing reading program. In one school, test scores are improving. (May 1970)

"Teachers' Contract" - Expensive and extensive new demands made by Teachers' Union for inclusion in 9/1/70 contract. To keep gifted teachers in the classroom, new positions should be created,in the administrative salary range, combining working with children with responsibility for training incoming teachers and para-professionals. (June 1970)

"Teachers' Contract Negotiations" - The issues separating the two sides and keeping the schools closed: salary increases, longer high school day, teacher absenteeism and accountability. (Sept. 14, 1970)

"Sex Education - What Is The School's Role?" - Need for drastic improvement in sex education. Goals of a good program. Need for new curriculum which focuses on human sexuality (attitudes, behavior and feelings) rather than "facts of life" and specialists to teach it. (Oct.6, 1970)

"Reading Gets Top Priority" - Increased funds, staff and time finally given to reading. Description of reading plans and District 4's guaranteed performance contract. (Nov. 16, 1970)

"New Teachers" - The more than 1500 inexperienced teachers entering the school system annually constitute a major problem to themselves and their students. Temple University improving teachers' preparation for urban classrooms. Lack of black high school teachers, counselors and administrators cited as major problem. (Dec. 14, 1970)

"Drugs, Schools and Youth" - Dimensions of drug problem among students and its complex causes. The School District's new drug curriculum guide and promising programs for preventing drug abuse. (Jan. 18, 1971)

"8th Graders Choose Their Courses - What Are The Implications, Limitations And Dangers Involved?" - Choice of 9th grade subjects starts student on a track which may lead nowhere instead of to his goal. Students and parents given inadequate information and often subjected to poor counseling. Almost all students should study algebra. (Feb. 15, 1971)

"Financial Crisis Update" - Chronology and explanation of the threatened closings between May 1968 and March 1971 and discussion of factors which caused budget to increase in size. (March 15, 1971)

"Integration" - Defines integration and necessity to achieve it and deplores School District's lack of commitment to it. Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission ordered Philadelphia School District to submit desegregation plan and filed a complaint. Newsletter describes hearings on complaint. (April 15, 1971)

"Learning And Happy" - Description of the Informal Classroom (Open Classroom, Informal Education) which has much to recommend it. A relaxed and frindly place where the emphasis is on the child's learning and not the teacher's teaching. (May 15, 1971)

"Learning Must Increase With Budget" - Includes description of the high price, in human terms and dollars, of the chaotic financial situation and the need to achieve scholastic success to win public support. (June 16, 1971)

"Budget Cuts Deep And Harmful" - Impact and implications of significant cuts made in 1971-72 budget. (Sept. 17, 1971)

"The Drive For Reading Improvement" - Progress made in the first year of a new effort to improve students' reading. Encouraging test results. (Oct. 22, 1971)

"The Parkway Program" - Description of Philadelphia's "School Without Walls", offering students freedom combined with responsibility for their own decisions. What could be adapted from Parkway and incorporated into existing high schools. (Nov. 18, 1971)

"Programs Not Padlocks" - Description of Academy of Applied Electrical Science which prepares previously non-achieving students for jobs. Also, the Continuing Education Centers which enable pregnant girls to continue their school work without interruption and assist them in maintaining their physical and mental health. (Dec. 16, 1971)

"Public Education, Keystone Of Our Republic" - History of long struggle to have free, publicly supported schooling for all. Discussion of its importance. Teaching of democratic values. (Jan. 20, 1972)

"Student Bill Of Rights And Responsibilities" - Contents of Bill described including rights, grievance procedure, ombudsmen. Value of Bill and why it was developed. (Feb. 18, 1972)

"Philadelphia Home And School Council, Drastic Reform Essential" - Council could and should organize parents, inform them, set an example of democratic procedures and give leadership to local associations. It could only do this if it underwent drastic reform to make it independent, deomocratic, membership-directed and adequately supported financially. (March 21, 1972)

"Money Can Make A Difference" - A response to those who argue that in education it doesn't. Also, an explanation of the increases which caused the budget to almost double in a five year period. (April 21, 1972)

"How Should Schools Be Financed?" - Discussion of two national studies of school financing. (May 19, 1972)

"Integrating Philadelphia's Desegregated Schools" - Discussion of one racially balanced high school and what is required to help students develop intergroup understanding and respect. Suggestions made for ways to maintain educational excellence, provide information and news of the

school and train staff for solving intergroup problems. Ways in which School District could support and promote its integrated schools. (June 19, 1972)

"After The Contract Settlement, How Will The Schools Be Kept Open?" - Discusses State subsidy vs. City tax support and the need to borrow cash each fall. (Sept. 11, 1972)

"Why Are The Philadelphia Public Schools Closed?" - After the City's labor negotiator took over, the Board of Education proposed to the Teachers' Union that secondary school teachers have larger classes, work a longer day and reassume some non-teaching duties. These proposals chopped away at contract demands previously won and caused the strike. (Sept.25,1972)

"Preparing Students For The World Of Work - The Schools' Role" Brief description of existing career development programs in Philadelphia and how they should be expanded. Career development is the systematic attempt to increase each student's view of career options and to help students plan and prepare for a career. (Nov. 9, 1972)

"The Skills Centers" - In simulated business and industrial settings, students learn saleable skills two days per week primarily through self-instruction with the aid of audio-visual materials. (Dec. 15, 1972)

"The Fact Finder's Report - A Basis For Settlement" - Fact finder appointed to make recommendations for settlement of key issues separating Board of Education and Teachers' Union. Report included findings on longer school day, preparation periods for elementary school teachers, non-teaching duties, class size and salaries. Findings influenced by School District's lack of funds. (Jan. 5, 1973)

"A Layman's Guide To The Schools' Financial Crisis" - The 1972-73 deficit and where it came from. Taxes for schools. Supplement lists and explains major taxes paid by individuals and businesses. (Feb. 22, 1973)

"Outcomes Of The Strike" - Its effects and how major issues were resolved. (March 22, 1973)

"A Letter About The Budget" - Why all have a stake in the public schools. Why City must increase its level of support. Improvements made in the school system since 1965. What has been cut from the budget. Why budget must be increased by $48 million. (April 21, 1973)

"Personnel Policy Decisions" - Description of new teacher selection procedure based on comprehensive profile with emphasis on prior teaching experience instead of National Teacher Examination score alone. Serious deterioration in quality of instruction directly related to proposed slash of 485 teaching positions during summer 1972 and employment halt which followed. (May 21, 1973)

"Affective Education" - Describes Affective Education, lists some of its identifying characteristics and points out the excellence and wide applicability of its staff training method. (June 25, 1973)

"How Should Title I Dollars Be Spent?" - A court suit alleged that the Philadelphia School District had violated Federal mandates in the spending of Title I funds. Four categories of violations described. Explanation of why 45 previously Title I schools became ineligible. Congress's intent in passing Title I. (Sept. 11, 1973)

"Lamberton And Its Effect On The System" - Lamberton's history. Why a secondary school was added to this elementary school and who it is intended to serve. Its detrimental effect on nearby schools. (Oct.15,1973)

"Retarded Children's Right To Education" - Court suit resulted in agreement guaranteeing all mentally retarded children in the State, regardless of the severity of handicap, a free, public program of education and training appropriate to their learning capacities. Impact on the children. Early school start recommended. Due process hearings for parents dissatisfied with child's placement. (Nov. 15, 1973)

"Edison High School - A History Of Benign And Malevolent Neglect" - Edison's shameful beginning. Description of ancient, combustible structure. Discussion of proposed site at Front and Luzerne and the opposition to it. (Dec. 14, 1973)

"Under Court Order To Submit Desegregation Plan" - Description of Board of Education's "Proposed Desegregation Plan" and what a sound plan would have included. Why desegregate? Desegregation on a non-racially identifiable basis - within the City and if a metropolitan regional school system was formed. (Jan. 31, 1974)

"Teacher Absences and Substitutes" - Teachers' absences are costly to children and the school budget as well. How attendance can be improved. Problem of getting substitutes and improving the quality and quantity of them. (Feb. 28, 1974)

"Instruction Must Continue Until Year Ends" - Recording of final grades 1½ to 3 weeks before the end of the year causes students to lose interest in school and teachers to stop classroom instruction. What has occurred in the past is explained and the plans for a change in 1973-74 are detailed. (March 31, 1974)

All issues of the Newsletter are on file in the Pedagogical Library, School Administration Building, 21st and The Parkway.

Extra copies of most issues are available for 25¢ plus postage. Supplies of some are exhausted. These would have to be copied and would cost 40¢ plus postage. Requests filled promptly. For information call Gr 3-0806 or write The Oakes Newsletter.

COMING IN MAY: TENURE AND EVALUATION

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

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THE TENURE LAW

Should tenure be abolished? Is it responsible for incompetent or unfit people being retained in our schools? To answer these questions, it is important to know exactly what tenure is, what the law provides and what purpose it serves.

Tenure is the right of teachers, principals and others to keep their positions unless there are good and sufficient reasons for dismissal. It is also their guarantee of due process. Those covered by it may retain their jobs unless the School District brings charges based on proper cause and has a hearing to determine if the employee can be dismissed.

Pennsylvania's tenure law was enacted in 1937 and provides statewide coverage to teachers, principals, vice principals, supervisors, counselors, school nurses and others. It provides for the semi-annual rating of probationary professional employees and the granting of tenure. Employees who have completed two years of service and been rated satisfactory during the last four months receive tenure. They are then given an employment contract which is automatically renewed each year. If they change jobs and work in another public school district within the State, they retain their tenure and don't have to serve another probationary period.

The tenure law, which is a part of the Pennsylvania School Code, provides eight causes for dismissal: immorality, incompetency, intemperance, cruelty, persistent negligence, mental derangement, advocation of or participating in un-American or subversive doctrines, and persistent and willful violation of the school laws of this Commonwealth.

The tenure law provides for the annual rating of professional employees. Ratings must be made by supervisors or principals and no unsatisfactory rating shall be valid unless approved by the Superintendent of Schools. The rating forms are provided to the local school districts by the State's Department of Education and require the school official to rate the employee either "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory". Underneath the word "satisfactory" on the form is a statement to define it: "Service of employee sufficiently acceptable to justify continuation of employment." Underneath the word "unsatisfactory", it says: "Improvement is essential to justify continuance in service."

An unsatisfactory rating must be supported by anecdotal records which give an account of the specific circumstances and facts upon which the rating is based. These records must be kept in a permanent file and a copy supplied to the employee immediately after he has been rated.

A school district preparing to dismiss a tenured employee must give him a detailed written statement of the charges and the oppor-

tunity for a hearing before the Board of School Directors. At the hearing, both parties and their witnesses testify under oath and the proceedings must be recorded by a stenographer. The employee may be represented by counsel and the hearing is public unless the employee requests that it not be. It requires a two-thirds vote of all the members of the Board of School Directors, in Philadelphia's case, six members of the Board of Education to decide that the employee should be discharged. This decision may be appealed to the State Secretary of Education in Harrisburg, then up to the court of common pleas of the county and finally to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

In the case of the dismissal of an untenured employee, the School Code requires notice, the giving of reasons and a hearing if demanded by the employee which can be held by one member of the Board of Education. Clearly, the individual employee's right to earn his income in the teaching profession is well protected by the tenure law and that is as it should be.

Tenure provides job security to employees, protecting them from arbitrary, capricious, or malicious dismissal. It protects the veteran music teacher from being fired to make way for the newly graduated one who is the daughter of the president of the local school board. It protects teachers of long experience at maximum salary from being replaced by first year teachers at beginning salaries to reduce the school budget. Tenure protects teachers and administrators from local pressure groups which might try to remove them from their positions for political, racial or religious reasons.

Tenure provides professional employees with academic freedom by protecting their right to pursue and examine with students currently unpopular or distasteful ideas. It makes it possible for teachers to engage in innovative activities or try new teaching methods in schools or areas of the city where conservatism might otherwise preclude it. Tenure protects those who espouse unpopular political or community causes and those who express independent views which may not agree with those of their superiors.

Tenure, in giving job security and academic freedom to teachers helps to provide students with a healthy educational climate. Students' interests are advanced when their teachers can concentrate on teaching without regard for political, commercial, or ethnic forces that might impinge on them if they were not protected by tenure.

RATING AND DISMISSAL

Principals are charged with the responsibility for helping new teachers to do a good job in the classroom. A principal who finds a teacher unable to control his class or prepare lessons, for example, begins as early in the year as possible to assist that teacher to improve. Among other things, he may offer the teacher suggestions, support, encouragement or the help of another professional. This is done for the sake of the students and the teacher, but it is also mandatory in building a case against a teacher who continues to do an unsatisfactory job. The principal must be able to document his efforts to help that teacher to improve and do a satisfactory job.

At the same time that a principal is offering assistance to a new teacher or a weak, tenured one, he observes him and confers with him. This must be done in keeping with the provisions of the Teachers' Union Contract if the observations and conferences are to become a part of the record. If the principal observes the teacher in his classroom, the Contract requires him to write a summary of his observations and provide the

teacher with a copy within five school days. If the principal wants to discuss the observation with the teacher, the Contract requires the principal (since the matter under discussion may affect the teacher's tenure or job status) to give the employee at least 24 hours notice in writing, inform the employee of the subject to be discussed and notify him that he may have a Union representative present. (Principals report that when a Union representative comes to the conference, the participants often become adversaries. The Union representative, as the principals view it, is present in order to defend the teacher and often does so by attacking the principal and blaming him for the teacher's problem. Such an approach would seem to preclude the use of this time to work cooperatively for solutions to the problem.)

After the conference, the principal continues to offer help to the teacher having difficulty, returns to the classroom for further observation and often holds another conference. To rate a teacher unsatisfactory, a principal must have written records of his observations, the conferences and his efforts to assist the teacher.

It is unfortunate, but true, that in terms of competence, tenure is denied only to those who are grossly incompetent. Because there is no official, objective, evaluation instrument for principals to use in rating teachers, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a principal to deny tenure to a teacher unless he stands out as unqualified, incapable or unsuited for the classroom.

Often a teacher who receives an unsatisfactory rating is given another chance in a new situation. This is acceptable practice for a beginning teacher who may need a fresh start in a different school or with a different age group to do an adequate job. This is totally unacceptable practice in the case of an incompetent, cruel or intemperate teacher who is finally, after great effort, discharged from a school. He should not just be moved on to another school where he will continue to hurt students.

When a teacher is rated unsatisfactory by a principal, School District practice requires the district superintendent to observe and rate that teacher too. Therefore, a principal's unsatisfactory rating places demands on the district superintendent's time. This, plus the strong possibility of unpleasant hassles with the Union over unsatisfactory ratings explains why some principals don't give them when they should. Principals may lack the security or self-confidence or stamina to take the necessary firm stand, but giving an unsatisfactory rating when necessary is part of the reason principals are paid from $18,300 to $27,900 to do their job. A principal, unwilling or unable, to discharge this important part of his responsibility should be removed.

A serious problem faced by some principals is that a great number of their teachers are new and inexperienced and the School District makes no allowance in its allocation of personnel for this. For example, there is a junior high school this year with 21 inexperienced teachers — 17 in their first year of teaching. The principal, given no extra staff for this purpose, can't possibly provide those teachers, 30% of his faculty, with either the assistance or supervision that they should have or that new teachers receive in other schools where the percentage of inexperienced teachers may be as low as 3%. This is grossly unfair to the students who are subjected to a lesser quality of teaching, the new teachers, and the system which runs the risk of giving tenure to individuals who should have it denied. Schools like this one should, without question, be given

additional staff to work with these teachers.

When a principal is unaware of a situation or closes his eyes to one in which children are being harmed academically, physically or emotionally by a tenured or untenured teacher, parents can play a role in that teacher's dismissal. Parents observing something which they believe to be detrimental to children should report it to the principal immediately and send him a written report of the incident as soon aspossible including names, date, time and place. The written record added to the verbal complaint will prod the reluctant principal to act. If, after giving the principal time to deal with the situation,he has not done so, and it is a serious matter, send copies of all the information you have to the principal,district superintendent, Superintendent of Schools and the President of the Board of Public Education. We do not have to, and we should not, tolerate teachers that are guilty of offenses that are grounds for dismissal under the tenure law. All of us should work to get such teachers out of the system.

Philadelphia,like other School Districts faces the problem of how to grant tenure only to those who will make the best teachers. The problem should be approached from many angles. Teacher training institutions should be more selective in accepting education students and either counsel them out of a program or fail them if their performance signals that they don't belong in teaching. Education students should be better prepared to take over their own classes through more student teaching experience. The School District's teacher selection profile should place weight on the quality of the applicant's student teaching experience in the expectation that this would aid in employing the candidates who would make the best teachers. Lastly, teachersshould be more uniformly assisted and more stringently evaluated so that tenure is given only to those who will be good teachers.

* * * * *

Tenure should be retained because it affords the teaching profession the essential security and protection which are in everyone's best interests. If incompetent teachers are kept in the system,it is not tenure that is to blame but a faulty evaluation process and administrators who don't do their jobs properly.

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

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GRATZ HIGH SCHOOL - THE LONG ROAD BACK

Gratz High School is advancing toward its target of educational excellence. Based on the inspired contribution of Dr. Marcus Foster* and with the continuation of its present leadership, the school will attain its goal of ably serving its students and preparing them to take their rightful place in the world beyond high school.

Gratz High School opened in North Philadelphia in 1927. It served a predominantly white population and gained the reputation for having an excellent academic program. In the early 1940's, black families in greater numbers began to move into the community. Gradually, over the next eighteen years, the percentage of black students in Gratz increased to more than 90%. Hundreds were from poverty striken homes. Many teachers fled the school. Expectation for student achievement was very low. Substantial staff turnover occurred annually. It became, as one teacher phrased it, "a backwater, a sad, forgotton place with an oppressive atmosphere." The school's white administration lost interest in the students and provided little or no educational leadership. Thus, victimized by racism at its ugliest and most destructive, thousands of black students were deprived of a sound educational experience. They left school with minds undeveloped, lacking the necessary academic skills to survive economically or deal successfully with the complexities of daily life.

In the spring of 1966, in response to an outcry from the community, a new principal, Dr. Marcus Foster, was appointed to Gratz. Arriving at the school, Dr. Foster found deplorable conditions. Gratz had the highest percentage of unfilled teaching positions of any comprehensive high school in the City. It was badly overcrowded. It lacked many extracurricular activities found in other schools and had the City's worst physical education facilities. Its unofficial motto was "Gratz is for Rats" and that phrase, perhaps better than any other, summed up the students' feelings and attitude toward the school. 80% of its students dropped out before graduation. Families with the most able students refused to send them to Gratz.

Because of Dr. Foster's charisma, drive, dedication and commitment to Gratz, he was able to change its image. In the nearly three years he was there, he made the students, their parents and the staff believe that they could achieve. He helped students to develop pride in themselves and their school. Under his leadership, the number of Gratz graduates going on to further education increased greatly and the dropout rate declined. He got business and

*Tragically, murdered in November 1973 while serving as Superintendent of Schools in Oakland, Cal.

industry interested in Gratz. The school's new slogan was "Go for Gratz".

In early 1969, the School District pulled Dr. Foster out of Gratz to fill a critical need elsewhere. He had been the first of what was to be a series of black male principals. Unfortunately, three different men served in quick succession after Dr. Foster. It was unavoidable, but it set Gratz back. A school, especially one in the process of being rebuilt academically, needs stable leadership if it is to grow and improve.

In the fall of 1972,Dr. Oliver Lancaster, the present principal, was appointed to Gratz. When he arrived, he faced a multitude of problems. The dropout rate was still too high,attendance too low. School spirit and pride needed to be boosted again. The vocational shops were a dumping ground where disinterested students put in time. There was no parent group organized in support of the School. Student government was ineffective.

During the year, another serious problem surfaced dramatically. The School, after hiring a clerk, found she couldn't do the job because she couldn't read, write or file. Sadly, she proved to be a recent Gratz graduate whose record showed a "B" in Clerical Practices. Investigation disclosed that many teachers throughout the school felt that an honest try, coupled with fair attendance,rated passing grades or better. They held students to no set or minimum standards of performance.

Solving the numerous problems required a staff that could work cooperatively together. Any possibility of achieving that kind of team effort in 1972-73 was lost when a bitter, divisive teachers' strike created animosities among staff members which poisoned relationships for months thereafter.

It is a particularly slow, difficult process to rebuild a high school because its organization is complex, the staff large. Gratz serves students of all levels of ability with totally diverse interests. It must, therefore, offer everything from a rich program in music to technical training, a college preparatory course to remedial reading. Gratz' staff numbers more than 200 and includes teachers, counselors, secretaries, aides, non-teaching assistants and custodians. Each individual plays a vital role in the life of the school and the quality of each one's contribution is ultimately the responsibility of the principal.

Dr. Lancaster is striving to create a new climate for learning and to improve programs throughout the school. There is so much that needs to be done. There is a whole set of problems resulting from the school's long neglect and the accompanying educational abuse of the students. Then there is another resulting from the necessity to make changes to meet today's students' needs and this is a common problem for high schools whether they serve black, white, urban or suburban students.

Dr. Lancaster's approach to upgrading and modernizing Gratz is to focus on the development of internal leadership. Individuals can be inspired, prodded, stimulated and helped to assume a leadership role in the development of a service or program for the school. Once they take hold and take over, the principal can assume a minor supportive role and he is free to concentrate on another crucial area. In this way, the principal can maximize his impact on the school while simultaneously harnessing Gratz' future to the creative energy of many people.

Dr. Lancaster is not winning any popularity contests at the moment. Most people that I talked with felt optimistic about the future of the School, cited school

programs or aspects of school life that are better,but did not credit the principal. Yet,to an outsider, it seems clear that it is his leadership, manifested by high standards, a demand for the best from each individual, and a drive for substantial changes and improvements, that is making the difference.

Spearheaded by Dr. Lancaster, some of the problem areas being worked on at Gratz this year are as follows:

Standards of Performance:Early this school year, the principal asked all teachers to outline for their students what would be expected of them to pass a given course. For example, a student to pass Typing would have to reach a certain level of accuracy and speed. If a high school diploma is to have meaning then at least a minimum level of performance should be required of students as they complete courses and earn their diploma. This represents a substantial change from past practice and will take time to implement fully. It is a problem in many other schools in the City as well and explains the often heard report that some students with diplomas lack the literacy skills to get or hold a job.

Anonymity: Students' feelings of anonymity are of great concern because they adversely affect motivation, attendance and the number who drop out. They are difficult to overcome in a student population of 3500. One method being tried at Gratz is assigning students who have a subject together to the same teacher for the homeroom period. This brings students and teacher together twice daily and enables them to get to know one another better. It enhances the possibility of developing a sense of belonging, group feelings and gaining attention for the individual.

Automotive Shops: Students are no longer assigned to the automotive,or any other vocational shop, unless they select it. The automotive shop program is being upgraded, with financial and other support from industry and is called G.A.S. (Gratz Automotive Sciences). The School has acquired two cars, one being prepared for racing and the other for antique shows. A bus load of students went to Atco Drag Strip in New Jersey this month for "Gratz Day". They saw the auto races, partly from the vantage point of the pits where they watched the mechanics at work as well. Sometime soon they will be entering their own rebuilt car in such races. What an imaginative, exciting way to motivate students! At the same time, the automotive shop course will gain a position of high esteem which it lacked and students in the course will have prestige which they have not had.

Next year, subject matter teachers will have their classrooms in the same separate building housing the auto and body shops. The subjects taught, such as English,science,or mathematics, will be geared to a student's interest in the automobile. The mathematics teacher will, for example, teach concepts by the use of automobile specifications, speeds, insurance and taxes.Reading skills will be taught using automotive instruction manuals and magazines. Teachers will work to coordinate classroom and shop learning. In this way, students' interest in academic subjects will be captured and they will be taught the academic skills and theory that they need for their shop work.

Self-Discipline: Students must develop inner controls so that they come to school daily and on time. Good attendance, punctuality, manners - all of these are prerequisites for getting and holding a job and become,therefore, survival training. Many students

have the opportunity to learn these things only if they are taught in school. Students gain self-discipline in a setting in which individuals care enough to set standards and hold them to them. The principal has mandated that poor attendance will result in lowering a student's grade in his course work. Some students will have to learn from bitter experience that teachers mean what they say, but it should have the desired result of improving attendance in the future. Gratz is working on punctuality by urging all teachers to make the first ten minutes of class important so that a student who is late, misses something valuable.

Unfortunately, space limits the number of worthwhile programs that can even be briefly mentioned. The reading program is extensive, geared to meet a diversity of student needs and to train subject area teachers to incorporate reading and study skills instruction into their courses. A remarkable lady makes it possible to distribute breakfast and/or a snack each day to two-thirds of Gratz' students. A course in "Practical Politics" exposes students to everything from a study of the constitution to participation in local candidates' campaigns.

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Dr. Lancaster's vision for Gratz' future is a school whose reputation for excellence and achievement draws students from all over the City. There are many staff members now who are moving the School toward this goal through gifts of their time, talent and devotion to the students that greatly exceed the requirements of their jobs. The kind of effort being made at Gratz deserves appreciation from the School System in the form of adequate staff allotments and the books and materials needed for new programs or the sustenance of ongoing ones. The public could assist too by volunteering their services in reading or other programs, offering jobs for students and giving money to the school for special needs that cannot be met through the School District budget. Gratz deserves School District and public support to compensate for past neglect, reward the current effort and make the school one of the City's best.

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