

# the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.XIV, No.1

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

September 1982

## SUPPLEMENTARY INDEX TO THE OAKES NEWSLETTER

### Index By Subject and Brief Summary of Issues

September 1980 through June 1982

This subject index is designed to help you locate all references to a particular subject appearing in The Oakes Newsletter in the last two years.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.XIV, No.2

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

October 22, 1982

## THE NEED TO LOOK AHEAD

At long last, the School District of Philadelphia is free of conflict and anxiety over a teacher's contract and its funding, and uncertainty about who will provide professional leadership to the schools. The School District has a new superintendent and a three year contract with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. The contract has a financial foundation which has been very carefully thought through. For the first time in a very long time, we can turn our attention to the very important matters of what and how the students are learning and how the system can be managed efficiently.

Philadelphia's new superintendent, Dr. Constance E. Clayton, was appointed October 4, 1982. She is black and a woman — two firsts for a permanent superintendent. She has a master's degree from Temple University and a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania. She began her career in 1955 as an elementary school teacher and has most recently been an Associate Superintendent For Early Childhood Education. She offers the promise of new leadership in new directions based on a strong belief that our children can learn.

The School District negotiators, the mayor, and his staff worked hard for months to hammer out a contract with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT). It was an extremely difficult task

because of the recent history of bargaining with the union, very limited financial resources, and the desirability of securing a long-term contract combined with a sound financial plan.

In its last contract with the School District, the PFT negotiated job security for its members together with salary increases and improved benefits which were to have begun a year ago in September 1981. The School District found it did not have enough funds to honor these commitments. This precipitated a long strike which lasted until a judge ordered everyone back to work at the end of October 1981. PFT members never did receive the increases that they had expected.

With that background, it was obvious that negotiations were going to be difficult. In addition, the mayor had specific financial goals for the contract. By being resolute and insistent, he eventually achieved his goals, improving the School District's financial posture and starting it on a new course. The final settlement even cost about \$7 million less than a Fact Finder's recommendations (mostly because the School District will pay 80% of premiums for Blue Cross and other medical insurance until August 1985 — 5% less than the Fact Finder recommended).

What was finally initialed on August 31, 1982 was a contract

that over its three-year life enables the School District to balance revenue against expenditures. The pact's cost will be funded by increased revenue expected from a combination of additional taxes passed by City Council, better enforcement of existing taxes, and some natural growth in city taxes and state subsidies. The Pennsylvania Economy League, a civic organization which researches governmental problems, reviewed the School District's revenue and expenditure projections and provided reassurance as to their soundness by concluding that they are "based on moderate, reasonable assumptions."

Before the contract settlement, the School District's deficit was \$70 million. The settlement did not increase it. Large deficits, or budgets skewed to hide them, had plagued the system for years. It was time to put the School District's financial house in order. Complex financing concepts, developed to eliminate the \$70 million deficit at the least possible cost, led to the sale of 20-year bonds. Now the Board of Education and the new superintendent must be certain that budgets are developed and adhered to so that this costly borrowing accomplishes its goal of restoring the School District to fiscal health.

It was possible to keep the contract's cost to an affordable level only because the union agreed to a provision deferring payment of a portion of the first year's salaries. Termed a "roll-over", it involves a change on September 1, 1982 to paying salaries over a 12-month period, instead of 10-months as previously. Payment for the two month deferred portion of the first year will be delayed until employees leave the system. As a result, the School District will reduce its salary expenditures by about 17% in 1982-83.

As part of the financial underpinning of the contract, the School District is pledged to reduce non-PFT connected spending by \$2.5 million annually. Part of this must come from the savings that will accrue from closing schools to bring school capacity more nearly in line with enrollment which has steadily declined. Some will come from not filling positions when people leave the system. Some must come from savings achieved through better management and greater efficiency.

The terms of the settlement make it clear that the union valued jobs for its members more highly than dollars. This serves the students' interest well because it means more teachers at lesser salary increases instead of fewer teachers at greater increases. While the 18% increase in salaries over three years may seem substantial, in reality it is spread over a longer period because the promised 10% raise of the previous contract due in September 1981 was never paid. In addition, the PFT settled for 6% in September 1982, a second 6% raise delayed until March 1984, and the final 6% in March 1985.

#### PREPARE STUDENTS FOR FUTURE

There are many things which must be done immediately to improve the schools, but we must also begin to think about and plan for making the substantial changes needed to better prepare our students for the future. We live in a world in which the danger of a nuclear holocaust is ever present; our natural resources are being dangerously depleted; world hunger, regional overpopulation, and maldistribution of goods threaten world stability; and technological change is occurring at an accelerated pace. It is a time when wise decisions and choices must be made by individuals and nations if the 21st century is to be a good time



in which to live. Schools in Philadelphia and nationwide must change to meet this challenge.

We must adopt new goals and pursue them with determination. As the globe becomes ever smaller, the interdependence of the peoples of the world increases. The very safety and quality of the air and water needed to sustain life depends upon personal and national decisions relative to such issues as atomic weapons testing, control of pollution, and methods of waste disposal. Young people must receive the scientific and economic background they need to understand such fundamental issues and to develop informed opinions and a basis for action.

In this age of nuclear weapons people must develop the skills needed to bring peace. All of us must have more understanding and respect for other cultures, and people who speak other languages and live their lives differently from ours. On our block or on the other side of the world, we must learn to replace force with negotiation, prejudice with understanding, discrimination with equality, and the narrow view with the broad one.

Today's youth will have great need for problem solving and decision making skills. These can and must be taught and students must be given opportunities to practice them. Students must learn through experience how to mediate conflict, arrive at fair compromises, and reach consensus.

The achievement of functional literacy, a minimum standard, is not nearly enough. As the world changes rapidly, it becomes even more necessary to be able to read with understanding and speak and write with clarity. Fluency in language is essential.

Students must come to view education not as something that stops when they finish school, but

as a lifelong process. For this to happen, students must find school rewarding so that when they leave they have the incentive and drive to continue to seek learning for the rest of their lives, both independently and in classrooms.

#### CHANGE NEEDED

Concurrently with the necessity to better prepare students for the future, the School District must substantially revise the way it operates and how it is administered. There is need for great change.

The School District must develop a sense of mission under its new superintendent. Regardless of their backgrounds and environments, young people enter school with enormous potential which it is the School District's obligation and sacred trust to develop. The students can achieve. The nation's best junior high school chess players and some of the country's outstanding high school jazz musicians come from poverty areas of our city. Some of tomorrow's fine scientists and writers are there too. We have only to help them develop their latent talent.

There must be a zeal for excellence and a high level of performance. It should start at the top with a Board of Education that has high expectations and makes demands of the superintendent and her subordinates. It must continue down the line to the schools and everyone in them.

Beginning now, the School District must strive to achieve certain essentials that form the foundation upon which to build a better system. Staff and student attendance must be drastically improved. Some divisions must undergo significant change so that they will meet the needs of the district while being run efficiently and staying within their budgetary restrictions.

The School District must establish good labor-management relations with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Three years without conflict over the settlement of a contract gives the School District time to forge such a constructive relationship. The old destructiveness of adversaries must end. It is to everyone's advantage to build a relationship based on trust, respect, and understanding.

The School District must better utilize its staff by making it clear that each person's input into plans and decisions is valued and that each has responsibility for the achievement of high standards. I am confident the superintendent will form a team with her top administrative staff and the district superintendents and set the tone for this. District superintendents must be held responsible for the way the schools run in their districts. They must be supported when they decide it is necessary to remove principals who are not able to manage their schools. Principals should be given much greater control over selection of their staffs and

should have more say over the allocation and use of the resources to which they are entitled.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is much to be optimistic about in October 1982. Our new superintendent has expressed her view that "all children can achieve, and all children deserve to be educated to the maximum of their abilities." She puts the children first. Her goal is excellence. For this system, these are fresh ideas with great power. Dr. Clayton deserves the full support of all those who share a vision of what the schools can become.

The School District has been given three years to concentrate on the quality of education offered. The District has a wonderful opportunity to reach out to the best minds, both here and nationwide, for help in preparing our students for the future. There appears to be a great willingness on the part of many to contribute to a renaissance of public education. The need is great. The time is now.

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# the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.XIV, No.3

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

November 17, 1982

## A PROPOSAL TO REFORM PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public education lacks strong support because of doubts about its quality. Employers are distressed because they have great difficulty finding skilled employees. National tests indicate that too few students have the ability to think critically, reason, write persuasively and apply judgment to the solution of mathematical problems.

With too many dropouts, students inadequately prepared for jobs and poor secondary school attendance, it is clear that there are serious problems in the classrooms. Visiting schools from pre-kindergarten up through the grades, one is struck by the fact that students are learning by rote too much of the time. The emphasis should be on the kinds of learning which engage the student's mind and require him to think, reason and deliberate. Teachers should be constantly striving for student understanding — not just mindless recitation of facts.

Clearly, there is an enormous need to change what is happening in the classrooms of our city and our nation. The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto\* is a short, well-written book which outlines a proposal for bringing about the necessary change. Writ-

ten by Mortimer J. Adler on behalf of twenty-two highly respected educators and scholars from diverse backgrounds who comprise the Paideia Group, it describes a way to reform public education. The reform is "designed to improve the opportunities of our youth, the prospects of our economy, and the viability of our democratic institutions."

The proposal's essence is captured by the definition of the word PAIDEIA (pronounced py-dee-a). It comes "from the Greek pais, paidos: the upbringing of a child. ...In an extended sense, the equivalent of the Latin humanitas ...signifying the general learning that should be the possession of all human beings."

Mortimer Adler points out that our country has achieved universal suffrage and a system of education that provides twelve years of schooling to all. However, if our democracy with its political institutions is to work, all students must have the same quality of education. It is not enough for youngsters to spend similar amounts of years in school, if when in school, "they are divided ...into those destined solely for toil and those destined for economic and political leadership and for a quality of life to which all should have access..."

The Paideia proposal is founded on the concept that every child should be provided with the same

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high quality of education provided to "the best." It states, "There are no unteachable children. There are only schools and teachers and parents who fail to teach them."

The Paideia Proposal advocates a one-track system of education that has three main objectives "for all without exception." Children should be prepared by their schooling to continue to learn throughout their lifetimes. They should be ready as adults "to take advantage of every opportunity for personal development that our society offers." Each individual should be provided with "an adequate preparation for discharging the duties and responsibilities of citizenship." Lastly, we must prepare our students to earn a living, "not by training them for one or another particular job in our industrial economy, but by giving them the basic skills that are common to all work in a society such as ours."

"To achieve these three goals, basic schooling must have for all a quality that can be best defined, positively, by saying that it must be general and liberal; and negatively, by saying that it must be nonspecialized and nonvocational." The Paideia proposal would do away with all specific job training during the first twelve years of schooling. "Anyone so trained will have to be retrained...The techniques and technology will have moved on since the training in school took place."

### THREE WAYS TO LEARN

One of the most important concepts of the proposal is that there are three distinct ways to teach and learn. They correspond to three essential goals of education or "three different ways in which the mind can be improved — (1) by the acquisition of organized knowledge; (2) by the development of intellectual skills; and (3) by the enlargement of understanding,

insight, and aesthetic appreciation."

Students must study "language, literature, and fine arts; mathematics and natural sciences; history, geography, and social studies." All of these areas of knowledge are essential if a person is to be educated. Traditionally, these subjects have been taught through lecturing, discussion and the use of textbooks. The Paideia proposal calls for utilizing these same methods, but studying these subjects in much greater depth and with more continuity than is now the case.

To learn such subject matter, youngsters must develop skills — "reading, writing, speaking, listening, observing, measuring, estimating, and calculating." To teach these, a teacher must assume a different role — one that is similar to that of a coach working with athletes. For example, instead of just demonstrating a dive for a student, an athletic coach would offer encouragement and suggestions as the student endeavors to perfect his execution of the dive by practicing it over and over. So it must be with the development of intellectual skills. Students must develop proficiency by practicing diligently and working hard to perfect them while teachers point out what they have done well and what could be improved.

The Paideia proposal's third goal of education calls for a way of teaching and learning that is used very little in our schools today. All kinds of books (except textbooks), works of art, pieces of music, and dramatic or dance productions would be utilized to enlarge understanding. The mind would be engaged "in the study of individual works of merit, whether literary or otherwise, accompanied by a discussion of the ideas, the values, and the forms embodied in such products of human art."

Teaching here is "by asking questions, by leading discussions, by helping students to raise their minds up from a state of understanding or appreciating less to a state of understanding or appreciating more." This way of teaching "stimulates the imagination and intellect by awakening the creative and inquisitive powers."

Each of these kinds of learning supplements and enhances the other two. For example, the acquisition of knowledge about the beginnings of our nation is enlarged when students thoughtfully read and discuss the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Their ability to do this, to defend an idea, or to act as a proponent for a point of view requires the development of the intellectual skills of reading, writing, and speaking. All three ways of teaching and learning are intertwined. They nourish and reinforce one another.

The Paideia proposal calls for a few specific "auxiliary subjects," such as physical education. It eliminates all electives. The course of study to be followed throughout the twelve years is a required one, allowing for choice only in the selection of a foreign language. If the proposal did not so limit the curriculum, "there would not be enough time in the school day or school year to accomplish everything that is essential to the general, nonspecialized learning that must be the content of basic schooling."

#### ALL CAN LEARN

The Paideia Proposal places some profoundly important ideas before us. First, virtually every child can learn what is today being offered to only a select few. Second, for the sake of our democracy, our economy, and the quality of life for each individual, we should be offering a demanding, challenging, academic course of

study to all students. Third, teaching must cease to be based almost solely on pouring information into students and become a process in which students become involved and engaged in their learning.

It is startling to be told that all children can master a demanding academic curriculum. In contrast to what is presently taught in Philadelphia, the Paideia proposal would require more mathematics, more science and a foreign language. The entire curriculum would be much more challenging from the earliest years. While it may be hard to believe that all children could achieve at these high levels, this conclusion has also been reached by an educational scholar and researcher in Chicago and, to some extent, has already been verified in some classrooms in Philadelphia.

Mastery Learning is an approach to teaching developed by Dr. Benjamin Bloom of the University of Chicago. His work led him to conclude that "what any person in the world can learn, almost all persons can learn if provided with appropriate prior and current conditions of learning." Initially, he believed that some students would need more time than others to arrive at the high levels, but his work in classrooms led him to conclude otherwise. Student progress depends on the preparation of the student for what he is about to be taught, his attitude toward his ability to learn, and the quality of instruction. Teachers in Philadelphia who have used Mastery Learning have found that a much larger proportion of their students can achieve than had been true of the same students before. Teaching, based on and modified by a strong belief that all children can learn, proves that this really is the case.

Since all are now eligible to participate in the democratic pro-

cess, each should have the knowledge and thinking skills to choose among the candidates. Many of today's issues are complex and an informed decision requires a background in science, economics, or government.

In this increasingly technological society, rudimentary skills are not enough. Low-skilled jobs are disappearing and higher-skilled jobs are increasing. If young people are to get and hold jobs, they must be able to articulate ideas, write clearly and persuasively, creatively utilize material that they have read, and determine what formula or process to apply to a mathematical problem. They must have developed their ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate.

Lastly, students must come to the end of their twelve years of schooling imbued with the desire and the determination to go on learning. It is essential for their personal growth and development, but equally necessary if they are to remain employable and fulfill their citizenship responsibilities.

The Paideia Proposal represents reform that is urgently

needed. It challenges some of society's basic assumptions about individual ability. Teachers would require a great deal of re-training to carry out its proposed reform. Clearly, it cannot be put in place overnight. That does not diminish the power of its message, nor the necessity to move forward.

Some steps consistent with the adoption of the Paideia proposal should be taken at once. The School District should make it clear that it places a high value on teaching that has two essential outcomes: the development of high level thinking skills and the deep involvement of students in their learning. Now under development, next year's budget should clearly demonstrate by its allocation of human and monetary resources that the District is placing a high priority on increasing the quality of learning that occurs in the classrooms.

The Philadelphia school system faces many problems that demand attention, but none should distract us from the necessity to focus on what is occurring in the classrooms. This should be our top priority. This is where we should strive for immediate change.

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# the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.XIV, No.4

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

January 12, 1983

## THE EXPECTATIONS AND MASTERY LEARNING PROJECTS

The Affective Education Division of the Philadelphia School District offers local schools some powerful ways to improve achievement. Two of these are the Expectations Project and the Mastery Learning Project. I visited four schools which have adopted one of these projects. At each school I found enthusiasm and people who, believing that success is attainable, are working together toward a common goal.

The Expectations and Mastery Learning Projects are very different. One is a school-wide effort to change the learning climate in the school, while the other is a teaching/learning technique utilized by teachers in their classrooms. However, they have some things in common. Both are founded on high expectations for students and holding to the belief that students have the capacity to achieve much more than has been previously demonstrated. They share a concept that the school's goal is to help students achieve academic success. If student learning is inadequate, or if some students are experiencing failure, teachers do not shrug off responsibility but look to their teaching to see if it can be improved. Both Projects recognize that students need praise and recognition for achievement.

The Affective Education Division introduces its Expectations Project to schools by explaining

it to the entire staff. There are four components: the development of standards, monitoring of progress, a reward and recognition system supporting student accomplishment, and improved communications with parents. Affective Education provides suggestions for developing and incorporating these components. They don't try to impose a plan, because they believe that each school staff must develop its own.

School staff members examine some of their basic attitudes. For example, is their school a good one and would they send their own children there? Teachers are encouraged to examine their answers. If changes are necessary, should they assume more responsibility? Does their response reflect attitudes which might negatively affect their work?

Staff meetings are used to help teachers look at their ways of responding to children so that they can eliminate negative behavior that is detrimental to the learning process. For example, it has been found that teachers frequently respond very differently to students perceived as having differing abilities. Those who teachers think have high ability are given plenty of time to answer questions. Those they believe have low ability are given a much shorter time. Such behavior, although completely unconscious, sends out a strong message about

teacher expectation. When teachers are made conscious of this, they can change and give each child the same chance. This self-examination process shows that there is room for improvement and gives the staff an incentive to work together to bring it about.

At Wm. Kelley and Willard-Powers Schools, which I visited, teachers have worked with the principal to set standards and raise them as improved achievement permits. There are minimum standards for promotion to the next grade but, very importantly, there is an equal emphasis on getting students up to national standards. At Willard-Powers the standards have been raised annually. The goal is to require the achievement of grade level in reading and mathematics for promotion to the next grade.

Both schools developed methods for monitoring their progress. In each case, the principals have established requirements for recording certain agreed-upon information periodically so that they can follow the progress of all the children all during the year. The principal is well informed and can offer teachers assistance, encouragement, praise or a prod, whichever seems most appropriate.

In both schools, students are recognized for doing well. Schools have traditionally had honors assemblies, displayed good work in the classroom and given awards in June. At Expectations Project schools there is an emphasis on reinforcing progress and recognizing work that is well done much more frequently.

Students' written work is displayed in classrooms, but also in the hallways for all to see. Students who have achieved certain academic goals, read the most books, or improved the most are listed on bulletin boards and recognized in assemblies. Teachers are encouraged to praise and recognize achievement and improvement

whenever they see it. Students, like adults, flourish in a climate of small and big successes. They are motivated, try harder, and achieve more.

In both schools, parents are consulted about what they want for their children and join in the drive for achievement. Kelley has three committees: Parent Involvement, Student Recognition, and Standards and Monitoring. On each one, parents serve with teachers and their ideas and assistance are sought and valued.

The Expectations Project has led to higher achievement. In June 1979, just before the Project started at Willard-Powers, 4% of the third graders were at or above grade level in reading. Three years later as the Project completed its third year, 34% of the third graders were on grade level or above. In addition, another 44% were within half a year of grade level. In mathematics 24% of the third graders were at or above grade level in June 1979 contrasted with 43% last June.

#### MASTERY LEARNING

Mastery Learning, as developed by Benjamin Bloom of Chicago, is a method of teaching/learning based on the belief that all children can learn. Bloom believes that "what any person in the world can learn, almost all persons can learn if provided with appropriate prior and current conditions of learning." When Bloom began his research, the prevailing view was that there are good learners and poor ones. In the 1960's Bloom operated on the theory that there are faster learners and slower ones. However, he found that "most students become very similar with regard to learning ability, rate of learning, and motivation for further learning — when provided with favorable learning conditions." Mastery Learning, therefore, is based on the belief that



all students can learn whatever schools define as important, getting grades of A or B and all students can be "fast learners" as well as "good learners."

There are five basic steps followed by teachers using Mastery Learning. Lessons are prepared so that teachers and students are clear about goals and what students must learn to achieve mastery. Lessons are taught and then a test is given to determine where, and if, more work is needed. Students who achieve mastery, usually pegged at scoring 80% or 85%, participate in enrichment activities, while those scoring below the level of mastery are retaught in some new way. For example, the teacher may present the material differently, or utilize students as tutors. More work and practice is often assigned. Lastly, another test is given and students have this second chance to demonstrate mastery and determine their grade. Some students will raise their scores appreciably between the two tests and still not get 80% or above. Teachers let them know that they still have made a significant gain and must keep trying because they can achieve mastery.

A classroom team spirit develops. The goal is mastery for all and teacher and students work hard to help and encourage everyone to achieve it. The teacher discards the view that some children will fail, some will excel, and many others will fall along the curve from poor to good. The presumption is that all can excel and that almost all will.

#### SCHOOLS ADOPT MASTERY LEARNING

I talked with the students in Mr. Ron Soloff's class at Adaire School. Mr. Soloff began working with Mastery Learning four years ago and implemented it in his classroom. This year, he is helping the entire staff to try Mastery Learning in their classrooms.

Soloff's students told me that Mastery is fun because they learn more. Whereas last year they flunked, this year they always get at least a second chance. When they don't understand the lesson, someone can help them. My visit came relatively early in the year, but some of the children who had had little faith in themselves were beginning to take heart and to believe that they could and would learn. The class was being propelled to new heights by a fine teacher's faith in their ability, his expectations, his drive to prepare them for 7th grade, and Mastery instructional techniques.

At Mitchell School, all the teachers are using Mastery Learning to teach mathematics. The driving force at Mitchell is the Mathematics Resource Teacher who began utilizing Mastery Learning four years ago in her own work, trained ten teachers in her school the following year and then, with backing from the principal, worked with the whole staff last year. Rachel Cole has always believed that children can achieve. Mastery Learning has given her a stronger basis for her faith and a technique for enabling children to prove they are, as she puts it, made of "star stuff."

Rachel Cole puts great emphasis on encouraging and rewarding small and large achievements. She developed and produces "Silver Certificates" for all students who prove they know all the basic number facts. They have to complete 40 number facts in 90 seconds for each of the four operations (+, -, x, ÷). The Silver Certificates, each with an embossed silver dollar, are highly coveted. The first year 23 children won them. The number rose to 36 the second year and to 110 last year.

Last year's city-wide Mastery Learning results indicate the great value of the program. Between the first and second test,

the percentage of students achieving mastery increased from 59% to 80% and the percentage failing dropped significantly from 24% to 9%. These results are conservative since they only measure the change between tests and thus only the unique instructional aspect of Mastery Learning. They don't reflect improved performance on the first test which occurs because of the teacher's belief in the students' ability; a helpful, cooperative atmosphere in the classroom; and the clear statement of goals for each lesson.

The Expectations Project and the Mastery Learning Project, important and fine as they are, need another component to fulfill their potential for significantly raising achievement levels and properly preparing Philadelphia's students for their future. Because the School District's reading curriculum is badly flawed, it must undergo major change before these Projects can really fulfill their promise.

Philadelphia teachers are required to teach certain so-called subskills of reading in a certain order. Children's days are filled with readers, drills, workbooks and filling in blanks. The need to complete these mechanical ac-

tivities leaves much too little time for reading, talking, and writing about ideas and information to be found in real books. Students do not find out from daily experience in school that reading is a very worthwhile activity because it is informative, horizon expanding, exciting, moving, stimulating, and fun. As a result, students plod along. Some learn to read in spite of the way they are taught. Judging by employers' complaints and achievement test scores in high schools, most do not. Clearly, there is a very pressing need to revise the way reading is taught at all levels.

The Expectations and Mastery Learning Projects help teachers to maximize learning for their students and merit enthusiastic support. The staff of the Affective Education Division which developed them is creative, hard-working and dedicated. Currently, they are mostly funded with Federal poverty dollars which means they cannot work in all schools. Their funds should come from the operating budget and should be increased so that the staff can be enlarged and their work spread more broadly. They have demonstrated what they have to contribute to the system in return.

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# the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.XIV, No.5

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

February 15, 1983

## STUDENTS MUST READ TO LEARN, NOT LEARN TO READ

The School District of Philadelphia should reexamine the way it teaches reading and writing. There is convincing evidence that the 1970's substantial efforts to improve reading instruction have not achieved their goal. Fundamental changes should be made.

Employers continue to complain that in all too many cases, public school students do not have the skills needed for even entry level jobs. Community college professors, working with students requiring remedial help prior to taking regular college level courses, report that students suffer from a distressing lack of background information. Students can say the words on the pages, but their knowledge base is so meager that the words often have no meaning for them. At one extreme are high school graduates with no time or place frame of reference. In a discussion, the students cannot readily decide when the nation was founded or within which century World War II occurred. Having no sense of geography, they lack a mental picture of the world with its continents and oceans. They can't name the ocean off California. East and west have no meaning for them. Without such basic knowledge, they have no systematic way to fix events or places and, therefore, cannot put into any logical context much of what they read or hear. Other Philadelphia graduates are not that badly off, but lack

essential information and understandings so that they have difficulty deriving meaning from what they read.

The School District has been citing higher scores on the California Achievement Tests as proof that the achievement of Philadelphia students is much improved, but even these tests raise serious questions about the way reading is taught. As students approach graduation, and the time when what they know is most significant, reading scores are the lowest. In 1982, from 29% to 34% of the students in grades 10-12 scored below the national 16th percentile, a level which indicates serious difficulty with reading. Only 26% to 28% scored above the national 50th percentile which represents almost no change since 1974.

Teachers in upper grades who want to challenge children to think and reason complain that students come to them unable and unwilling to use their minds. The students want a page of blanks to be filled in which can then be marked right or wrong. They complain about and resist thought-provoking questions to which there is no one-word, correct answer. Their higher order thinking skills of analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating are weak or non-existent.

Observing in classrooms provides insight into the problem. The drive to improve reading in-

struction has led to a narrow, circumscribed curriculum. Children do most of their reading in basal readers. They spend hours pouring over workbooks and work sheets which provide drill in phonics, grammar and spelling. All of this is totally divorced from content, e.g., the arts, literature, science and social studies. Therefore, the purpose of learning to read and write is lost. Children do not gain the basic knowledge they need. They are not encouraged to think and reason. They are not motivated to read on their own. They don't discover that reading can be meaningful, rewarding, fascinating, informative and fun.

Visits to two contrasting classrooms will shed light on what children are experiencing in Philadelphia's schools. The first classroom is typical of thousands. The walls show no evidence that children are experiencing interesting or exciting subject matter. There is a phonics chart which shows, for example, the "gr" sound as used in "grape." The alphabet and numbers are displayed above the blackboard. There are publishers' posters urging children to drink milk every day and stand up straight and one which illustrates the primary colors. The only children's work displayed is some ditto sheets that the children have colored.

In this typical room, the children spend part of each day in their reading group working with the teacher in their basal readers. During other parts of the day, they get instruction and practice in areas like phonics, possessives, plurals, finding the main idea and supporting details. Children working with words, phrases, sentences, or short selections fill in boxes or blanks or circle the correct answer.

The teacher has a time slot for arithmetic, spelling and handwriting. The children go to a spe-

cialist teacher during one period. Then, the day is gone. In some classes, the last few minutes of the day are devoted to reading a poem or story. In others, the last period is sometimes spent reading about and discussing topics like children's lives in other lands. However, children can experience whole days when all the reading they do is in a basal reader. They don't read from a library book, or use a reference book, and no literature is read to them. Entire days can pass with no study in the content areas except for arithmetic, and that too may be just drill work.

#### RICH ENVIRONMENT

Contrast this classroom with another that is very different and much too scarce. Here the environment is rich in pictures, materials and real books. Clearly, the teacher wants to interest the children in learning. There is a series of pictures of different kinds of dinosaurs in one part of the room. Elsewhere, posters are displayed of snakes and turtles. There is a large picture of a panda and a live turtle in an aquarium. Children's paintings and illustrated stories hang in many parts of the room.

The first classroom activity of the day is journal writing. Each child has a notebook and almost every day s/he writes something in it. It is a busy time. Many children take pieces of paper to the teacher or to another child to get words spelled. Then, that word goes down correctly on the paper and into their word "banks." Journal entries get longer as the year progresses.

During the reading activity time which comes next, children read books chosen for their high interest, richness, and diversity. Some of the children are reading books which have entrancing photographs of baby animals. The teach-

er gives them thought-provoking questions to enhance their learning. The animal I am describing is about the same size as what? My animal comes in what colors? Where does it live? The books do not provide the answers directly so the students have to extract information, use knowledge they already have, or use other books.

When the children gather to hear a story, it is about an alligator that is ten feet long. Its nest is about two feet high and is covered with grass and mud to make it blend with the surroundings. When the teacher asks if anyone knows how big ten feet is, one child relates the size to the distance from the ground to a basketball hoop. Another child knows that the alligator is "camouflaging" its nest. The story is fascinating. The children's vocabularies and backgrounds of information are enlarged, and their interests are broadened while they enjoy good writing and beautiful pictures. This experience teaches them that learning to read is worth the effort because there are such great things to be read.

In this second classroom, the processes of reading, writing and speaking are integrated with subject matter from the various disciplines. Children are fascinated by dinosaurs. Dinosaurs, or creatures of the deep, or any of thousands of other topics, can provide a framework for learning. Under these circumstances, children read for the purpose of learning something of interest to them. They talk with others to share their discoveries and compare notes. Often, they write down what they learn in the form of an illustrated report to be shared with others. Learning has purpose.

Over a period of several years, Philadelphia's elementary school classrooms evolved into the sterile environments that characterize so many today. It began in the

late 1960's when standardized test scores shocked everyone with the very dismal picture they portrayed. Tens of thousands of Philadelphia students were badly handicapped because they read so poorly. A drive was begun to find a systematic way to teach reading so that children would be better prepared. What resulted was a competency based curriculum. Reading was broken down into large numbers of skills and sub-skills to be taught in sequence and then tested. The outcome is that in classroom after classroom students are being taught short and long vowel sounds, lists of homonyms, antonyms and synonyms. They are being taught capitalization, periods, and commas in the context of sentences teachers put on the board. All of this pushes almost everything else out of the school day. If students can't identify root words or combine words to make compound words, that will show up on the test. If teaching these things leaves a teacher with no time to read a book to the class, that omission will go unnoted.

#### THE SYSTEM'S EXPECTATIONS

Under its last superintendent, the school system strongly expressed what it valued by placing great emphasis on the California Achievement Test scores. The system sent out another clear message of what was expected of teachers by developing tests, to be given periodically, to determine how well students learn each of the skills and sub-skills of reading. Teachers, striving to fulfill the system's expectations as they understand and interpret them, have focused more and more on teaching reading and writing in a fragmented and isolated way.

Achievement tests should play a much less important role in judging School District progress. The school system should develop and use several different measures to evaluate student progress. Is

library use increasing? Are students writing longer, more varied pieces? How well can they read and understand connected passages of some length? Are they developing higher order thinking skills? Is attendance up?

At the end of the 1970's, a large number of educators across the nation became deeply concerned about the "failure of students to reach high standards." Educators from fields as far apart as music and business education joined with the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals to state their views. Twenty-two national, professional education associations signed an "Essentials of Education" statement stressing "the interdependence of skills and content." "Skills and abilities do not grow in isolation from content. In all subjects, students develop skills in using language... they develop the ability to reason... Students master these skills and abilities through observing, listening, reading, talking, and writing about science, mathematics, history and the social sciences, the arts and other aspects of our intellectual, social and cultural heritage. As they learn about

their world and its heritage they necessarily deepen their skills in language and reasoning and acquire the basis for emotional, aesthetic and social growth..."

Currently, students in Philadelphia are not being prepared to become life-long learners or successful wage earners and citizens. This is not a time to condemn or blame, but we should recognize our failure and take steps to rectify it.

I am confident there are many colleges and universities in the Philadelphia area that would welcome the opportunity to assist the School District in carrying out the Essentials of Education mandate. They have worked on this task already as have educators in other cities.

There are teachers and principals who know how to embed reading, writing, and speaking instruction in the content areas. There are creative teachers with interests and knowledge which could be enthusiastically shared with students. The Philadelphia schools have a dynamic new leader in Superintendent Constance Clayton. We have what is needed to begin going down a new road that will lead to success.

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# the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.XIV, No.6

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

March 11, 1983

## SCHOOL CLOSINGS — PRO AND CON

The School District of Philadelphia has a declining student population. When this is coupled with serious financial problems, it becomes very clear that the School District must close schools so that it may concentrate its financial resources on providing services to children instead of staffing and maintaining excess school buildings. Identifying which schools should be closed is difficult. Parents and communities value their schools. They view the local school as a resource and an important element of stability in the community. They may be fearful about what will happen to the building after the school is closed. Intense emotions fuel the forceful drive to keep individual schools open. However, the case for closing schools is compelling because it is based on the necessity to focus scarce resources on the education of students.

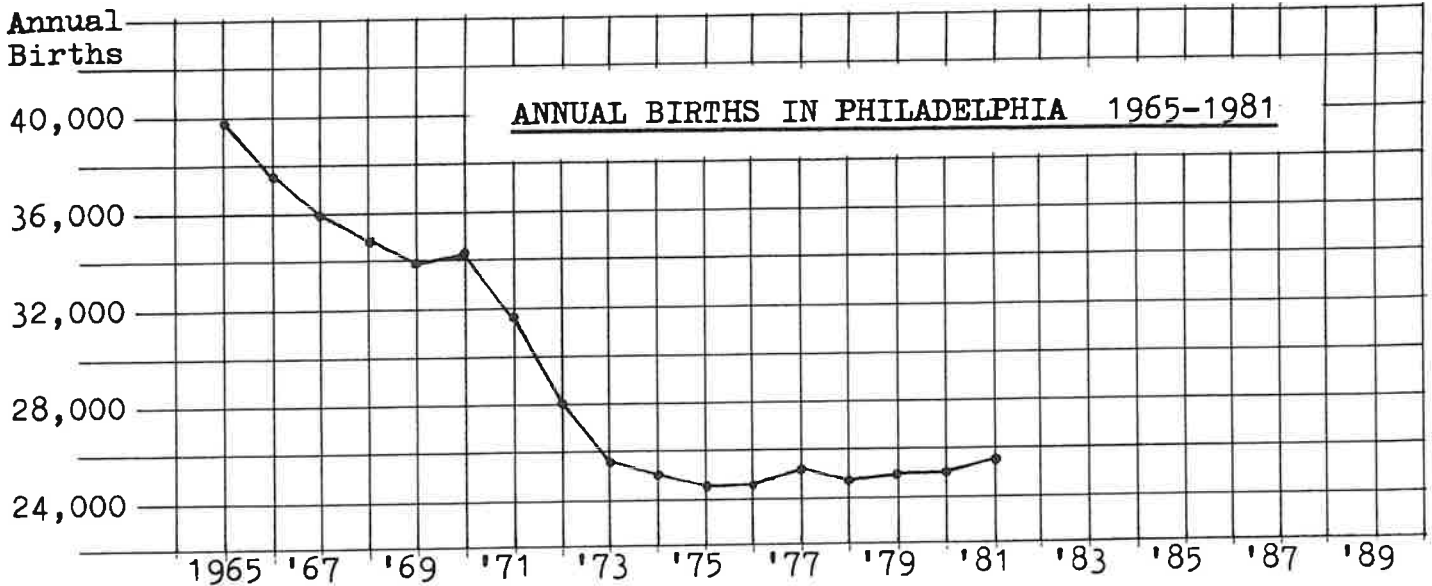
There are understandable reasons for the strong emotional opposition that is manifested when a school is proposed for closing. Parents, children, and staff have a major investment in their school. A proposal to close it threatens parents who have been active in the home and school association, or served in some other capacity. They have invested their time and effort, become known, and found a niche. They do not want to relinquish what they have built.

Children resist closings too. They attend hearings and testify. Listeners cannot help but be moved by their appeals, factual presentations, or tears. Students are attached to their school and teachers and are apprehensive about the unknowns of a new school and the possibility of not being accepted. One young girl worried tearfully that her younger brother might get lost on his way to a different school.

For teachers and principal, the possibility that their school may close is a wrenching thought. If they are a close knit staff, the possible closing is especially painful. They must face the necessity to reestablish themselves in a new setting and develop working relationships with different colleagues. This is particularly difficult for a principal who over a long period of time has laboriously built a well-oiled educational machine with strong parental support and is now faced with beginning anew.

Local communities often oppose school closings because they visualize a boarded up building which is ugly, detracts from its surroundings, and is a target for vandals. Unfortunately, this has happened in some cases so community opposition is understandable.

Philadelphia's public school enrollment peaked in 1969 at 284,000. Since then, it has



steadily decreased to the current 208,000. It is projected to continue its decline until it reaches 178,000 in 1990. Since enrollment and annual births are directly related, informed forecasts are possible. 40,000 babies were born in Philadelphia in 1965 and 35,000 in 1970. The number dropped into the 25,000's by 1973 and has hovered around that ever since. ( See graph.) Analysts estimating future enrollment must take into consideration factors such as the movement of people into and out of the City and decisions parents will make about placing their children in nonpublic schools. Barring unforeseen circumstances of major dimensions, the big 37% reduction in the number of births must lead to a declining student population. So far, the sharpest enrollment drops have been at the elementary and junior high school levels, reflecting a like drop in annual births beginning in the late 1960's and young families leaving Philadelphia. This substantial

drop will have further effects at all levels but will begin to affect high school enrollments in a major way in five or six years as the youngsters born in 1973 reach grades 9 and 10.

The capacity of existing schools, excluding leased facilities and portables, is over 240,000. This takes into consideration the way classrooms are being used for prekindergarten programs, special education, vocational education, etc. Since this year's enrollment is 208,000, there is an existing gap between enrollment and capacity of at least 32,000. It is quite clear that schools can, and should, be closed this year. Looking to the future, we know that more schools should be closed because enrollment will drop further creating additional excess space.

There are appreciable savings to be realized by closing schools. The net savings for a typical elementary school is about \$250,000.\*

\* \$85,000 per school (representing teachers' union positions) is already a part of the School District's financial plan and included as savings due to enrollment decline in the 1983-84 budget projections. These positions will be eliminated whether schools are closed or not. Closing schools will enable the School District to spread its reduced staff over fewer buildings, enabling it to provide better service.



That includes the reduction of a principal's position, counselor, language skills teacher, library assistant, secretary, custodial staff and savings for heat and light, slightly offset by the costs of securing the building and moving furniture and equipment out. Closing twelve elementary schools would save \$3 million per year. If over a period of time, the school plant is reduced by forty elementary schools, or some combination of elementary and secondary schools, the annual savings would be at least \$10 million — a very substantial sum.

School closings would result in a decrease in the number of buildings that have to be maintained, and an increase in the School District's ability to improve the condition of its remaining facilities. Currently, there is a very large gap between the funds needed and those available for essential repairs. As a result, the School District faces problems such as leaking roofs which damage ceilings, render floors unsafe and rooms unusable, and threaten to destroy valuable equipment such as computers. With fewer facilities, there would be a greater possibility that the School District would have enough funds to bring the condition of its schools up to acceptable levels.

#### SCHOOL ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

The Philadelphia School District has a School Assessment Committee chaired by Mrs. Ernestine Rouse, a member of the Board of Education. The Committee is composed of Board of Education members and representatives from City Council, the City Planning Commission, Home and School Council, the mayor's office and several community organizations. The Committee met for months to refine criteria, discuss specific schools and decide which should be suggested for closing. The criteria used included the age of the building and its

physical condition, percentage of underutilization, enrollment, efficiency of the heating plant, the effect closing would have on desegregation, and whether children could walk to nearby schools easily and safely, or would need bus transportation.

The Committee found that there is much to be considered. In many cases there are special circumstances. Detailed knowledge of school buildings and communities is required to be aware of everything that should be taken into account. Standardized forms don't reveal that a school has just been modified to absorb a child care center, or that some children in a school experienced a school closing two years ago. If a school was proposed for closing, the Committee endeavored to be certain that those students would be able to go to nearby schools with equal or superior facilities where the level of achievement is equal or superior, and where any special programs available in their school would also be available at the receiving school(s).

Since most of the schools proposed for closing have enrollments under 400 (some under 500), nearby schools would be able to accommodate the students. At the same time, parents would be encouraged and urged to examine many programs and select one that would serve their children well and enhance desegregation too.

Because it was possible to propose closing school(s) in all but one subdistrict which is too crowded now to reduce its available space, the list places an equitable burden on the black and white communities. The School District is about 63% black, 27% white, 8% Hispanic and 2% Asian. 29% of the schools being proposed for closing are predominantly white.

The School Assessment Committee is working with the City Plan-

ning Commission to develop an effective process so that schools that are closed will be used in as many cases as possible. Decisions about future uses of a surplus school should involve the community so that its interests and needs can be understood and well served. Surplus schools can provide additional space for public facilities, or replacement space for City services. If leased or sold, they can generate revenue for the School District, or add buildings to the tax rolls. The Assessment Committee is firmly committed to developing a systematic process so that, wherever possible, closed school buildings become an asset to a community and not a liability.

There are those who argue that all schools should be kept open in order to better serve children and communities. They say that budgets are for fiscal managers who don't understand human needs. The hard reality is different. Because the

School District remains in a severe financial bind, stretching scarce resources over a greater number of schools than are needed would hurt the quality of education for all. It would lead to a greater deterioration of the physical plant. If savings projected for school closings don't materialize, there is the strong possibility that special and non-mandated programs may have to be eliminated. Textbooks, materials and supplies will be in even shorter supply.

The educational needs of Philadelphia's students will best be served by closing schools. In addition, the School District's three year financial plan assumes annual non-teachers' union expenditure cuts. Therefore, the fiscal integrity and credibility of the School District rest, in part, on the willingness of the Board of Education to make the difficult, but necessary, school-closing decisions.

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With this 118th issue, The Oakes Newsletter completes its thirteenth year of publication. I would like to express my gratitude to The Alfred and Mary Douty Foundation and The Philadelphia Foundation for their generous support of the Newsletter over a long period of time. My thanks also to Rita Oakes, a talented editor, who helps me to make each issue clearer and more concise than it would otherwise have been.

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# the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol.XIV, No.7

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

April 19, 1983

## THE ROSE LINDENBAUM AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

In 1981, Dr. John McGovern was selected to receive the Rose Lindenbaum Award which is given annually to ten of the School District's most outstanding teachers. A visit to John McGovern's fourth grade classroom quickly reveals why he was chosen.

Dr. McGovern believes that his students can and will learn. Without regard to previous levels of achievement, or ethnic, or economic background, he has high expectations for his students. He believes they can be stimulated, challenged, encouraged and coached to achieve more.

Because many of Dr. McGovern's students lack a good self-image, they must be encouraged to believe in and feel good about themselves so that they may advance and blossom academically. John McGovern is always looking for ways for children to taste success and receive recognition. He is quick to praise good work of every kind — a thoughtful answer, the meaning of a difficult word, a creative solution, or a kindness to another child. He creates opportunities for children to have "a moment in the sun." For example, during a sharing time, he was fascinated and amazed by the pretty flower that one girl had folded from paper. He was pleased with the poems that another child had written and illustrated and he had them posted. Each child was made to feel good as s/he shared something with the class.

John McGovern is a Vietnam Veteran, drafted at 18, who came back to Philadelphia and went to night school at Temple University. He worked first as a non-teaching assistant and later as a teacher. He secured his B.A. degree in 2½ years and over the next 8½ years received his M.A. and Ph.D.

John McGovern deserved to be honored as an exceptionally fine teacher. The students who have the good fortune to be in his classroom spend a year with a teacher who cares deeply about them and believes strongly in their potential. They associate with a person who helps them to know, learn from, and admire some of the great thinkers who have contributed to our knowledge, culture and values. They improve their ability to speak, read, write and compute in a meaningful context with much of this learning embedded in the humanities and science. Their classroom life is rich in experiences of all kinds as their teacher shares with them his broad, varied background of knowledge and interests.

John McGovern has a doctorate in children's literature. He believes that part of becoming a fulfilled human being is experiencing the joy of reading. He wants his students to know that in books they can find adventure, mystery, beauty, information, insight, escape, knowledge, and challenge.

John McGovern's classroom, both in its physical layout and the daily schedule, reflects his enthusiasm for books and reading. There are books all around the room. He strives to "wrap" his students in them. Many are displayed, front covers showing, on several six feet tall sloping racks that he made himself. At one end of the room, there is a "fireplace" where children can go to read in a cozy atmosphere. The fireplace has a mantle that Dr. McGovern found on trash day, repainted, and put up. Under it are logs with a light that makes them appear to be burning.

### THE VALUE AND FUN OF READING

Reading plays a very important role in his classroom. Besides the reading found in most classrooms that occurs in reading groups using a publisher's series of books, John McGovern reads to his students one or more times every day. He believes they deserve to hear good literature and was just finishing E.B. White's Charlotte's Web when I was there. Time is also set aside every day for children to read silently to themselves. A sign on the classroom door bars interruptions. For a period of time, everybody in the room reads a book. Children in Dr. McGovern's classroom come to know the value, importance, and pleasure of reading.

Writing is also of major importance in this classroom. Many of John McGovern's students are fearful about writing because they associate it with failure and the unpleasant experience of papers covered with red penciled errors. It takes many months to get them to the point where they can write their thoughts freely and worry later about correcting errors in the editing stage. Each day, time is provided for students to write in their personal journals which Dr. McGovern looks at only if invited to do so.

John McGovern uses science and other subjects to give students opportunities to write. When I visited it was Day 3 of an experiment involving the germination of a large seed. Dr. McGovern drew from the students and wrote on the blackboard a description of what they had done to date. Each student had a baby food jar which became a Germination Chamber when s/he placed water, a paper towel, and two lima bean seeds in it. Dr. McGovern asked them to copy what they had composed together and then look at their own seeds and record their observations. Writing under such circumstances has purpose because students come to see that their records enable them to know exactly what steps the seed went through as it developed a root and a sprout.

John McGovern teaches mathematics in different ways. He uses concrete materials, drill, thought-provoking problems, and science experiments too. One morning the students worked with wooden rods of different lengths. There were ten different sizes and colors corresponding to lengths from 1 through 10 centimeters. The children worked with problems such as "find the rod that is the size of two whites." After a time, Dr. McGovern held up a meter stick and asked the children to estimate how many orange rods (10 centimeters) there are in a meter. Their estimates ranged from the correct answer which is 10 to 24. Having attempted to make an estimate, each youngster had his interest aroused and should have less difficulty remembering that there are 100 centimeters in a meter. Each child traced his hand spread to its fullest, measured the length of each finger and the span. 15 centimeters will mean something to them because they now associate it with the span of their hands.

Another morning the students practiced their number facts by solving three place addition and

subtraction problems as fast as possible. Also, there were problems for extra credit which utilized higher order thinking skills.

A couple of weeks ago, John McGovern took his class to the park to fly a rocket. They tested the rocket with increasing milliliters of "fuel" and measured the number of meters it flew each time. They pondered the question of why, after a certain point, more fuel reduced the length of flight. When they returned to class they graphed their results. Five of the students made a four-panel display chronicling the experience. It was complete with compositions about the experiment and Isaac Newton's Laws of Motion, a graph, and charming crayon drawings of the children in the park.

Clearly, science is taught for many reasons. It stimulates interest, teaches children to think in a scientific way, helps them to learn to use reference books, provides students with necessary information, and enhances the teaching of the three R's.

A tour of Dr. McGovern's room tells you more about life in his classroom. There are two scrapbooks made from discarded wall-paper sample books which provide heavy paper to mount on. One scrapbook is titled the "Pythagorean Society" and has a wonderful Carl Sandburg poem, "Arithmetic", on the first page. The scrapbook contains rules that children have discovered for themselves about mathematics. Diana's rule is that any number multiplied by zero equals zero. Examples are given:  $42 \times 0 = 0$ . Joyce discovered that any number multiplied by an even number comes out to be even. Example:  $3 \times 2 = 6$ .

The second scrapbook is for poetry that the children are writing and illustrating. They have worked with Japanese Haiku, a form of poetry 17 syllables long and about nature. To compose it, you

have to learn to count syllables and be able to think of synonyms for words that don't fit.

The Rachel Carson Nature Museum has a prominent spot in the room. A plastic case that used to hold watches in a store now displays a shell exhibit. At other times during the year, it houses fossils, rocks or other items drawn from nature. The children know of Rachel Carson and her deep concern for preserving our natural heritage. They are reminded of her and what she stood for by their museum.

#### ROSE LINDENBAUM

John McGovern is one of forty, soon to be fifty, Philadelphia teachers honored with the Rose Lindenbaum Award. Miss Rose Lindenbaum is a remarkable woman who has devoted her life to the school children of Philadelphia. She began as a special education teacher in 1929, became a vice principal in 1959 and retired in 1972. During the last nine years of her career, she worked as a supervisor on an individual basis with failing special education teachers helping them to become successful.

During this period, Miss Lindenbaum decided that she would like to do more to help teachers improve and to reward excellence. That prompted her, before her retirement, to decide to will funds to the School District to make annual awards to outstanding teachers. After she retired and inherited some money, she decided that she could live comfortably even if she gave \$100,000 during her lifetime to the Board of Education to establish a trust to provide the awards. She made this very generous gift in June 1977.

Since the spring of 1979, ten teachers have been selected each year. Principals nominate teacher(s) from their school. District superintendents, depending on the

district's size, reduce the number from their district to two or three. Six judges, three retired principals and three retired teachers picked annually by the Philadelphia Public School Retired Employees Association, narrow the list down to ten from the 18 or 19 submitted to them. Seven are to be teachers of regular children and three are to be teachers of special education children. Teachers must be selected on the basis of the following criteria. They "must have completed at least seven years of teaching, possess genuine love and interest in the welfare of children, be dedicated to the teaching profession, possess ability to produce results in the classroom, be creative and seek to grow professionally" and "possess high moral, intellectual, and social integrity."

The Rose Lindenbaum Awards are usually given at the Home and School Council dinner in May. Each of the ten teachers is presented with an engraved citation giving the reasons s/he is being honored, and a check which represents one-tenth of the income of the Trust for that year.

Given Miss Lindenbaum's financial circumstances, her gift to the School District represented a

significant sacrifice and a measure of the importance she places on acknowledging and rewarding excellence. She believes that showing appreciation to teachers will "boost teacher morale...tend to lift the image of the teaching profession," and "create an incentive...to work harder to improve the quality of education in the classroom."

Miss Lindenbaum has made an extremely important contribution to the City's schools. The annual awards focus attention on the qualities of outstanding teachers — love of teaching, intellectual curiosity, imagination, depth of knowledge, and the ability to motivate students to put forth great effort.

Rose Lindenbaum's gift helps to create a climate in which talented teachers can flourish. It stimulates and inspires teachers to work hard and strive to achieve their very best. Her gift enables the School District to identify models of fine teaching, like Dr. John McGovern, and to search out and reward the best practitioners of the art. Each year, the School District can stress the fact that excellence in teaching is desirable, appreciated, recognized, and rewarded.

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# the OAKES newsletter

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

Vol. XIV, No. 8

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

May/June 1983

## EDUCATIONAL REFORM - A MATTER OF SURVIVAL

The National Commission on Excellence in Education, created in 1981 by Secretary of Education T.H. Bell, was directed to report on the quality of education in the United States. The Commission includes representatives from public and higher education, school boards, business and government.

Dated April 1983, A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform\* was presented as "An Open Letter to the American People." Well worth reading in its entirety, it explains why the nation is at risk, defines excellence in education, discusses the public's strong commitment to education, and gives its findings and recommendations.

The report begins — "Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world... the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people...

"Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high ex-

pectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them...

"History is not kind to idlers. ...The world is indeed one global village. We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors... Knowledge, learning, information and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce and are today spreading throughout the world... Learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the 'information age' we are entering.

"Our concern...includes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people which knit together the very fabric of our society...individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life. A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom...

"Part of what is at risk is the promise first made on this continent: All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their in-

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dividual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself."

Testimony documented the "educational dimensions of the risk." The nation has 23 million functionally illiterate adults. From 1963 to 1980, there was a steep decline in scores on the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests. There is a large percentage of 17-year-olds who do not possess essential higher order thinking skills. Business and the military complain that students do not have the minimum competencies that they require.

#### EXCELLENCE

The essence of the Commission's report is captured by its definition of "excellence." "At the level of the individual learner, it means performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits, in school and in the workplace. Excellence characterizes a school or college that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them. Excellence characterizes a society that has adopted these policies, for it will then be prepared through the education and skill of its people to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world..."

The second half of the report is devoted to the Commission's findings and recommendations relating to "four important aspects of the educational process: content, expectations, time and teaching... recommendations are based on the beliefs that everyone

can learn, that everyone is born with an urge to learn which can be nurtured, that a solid high school education is within the reach of virtually all, and that life-long learning will equip people with the skills required for new careers and for citizenship."

The Commission recommends that "state and local high school graduation requirements be strengthened and that, at a minimum, all students seeking a diploma be required to lay the foundations" in what it calls "the Five New Basics." In grades 9-12, students would be required to take four years of English, three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies and one-half year of computer science. In addition, the Commission recommends proficiency in a foreign language because this "introduces students to non-English-speaking cultures, heightens awareness and comprehension of one's native tongue, and serves the Nation's needs in commerce, diplomacy, defense, and education."

"The high school curriculum should also provide students with programs requiring rigorous effort in subjects...such as the fine and performing arts and vocational education."

Writing of standards and expectations, the Commission recommends "that schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations, for academic performance and student conduct... This will help students do their best educationally with challenging materials in an environment that supports learning and authentic accomplishment."

It recommends that "significantly more time be devoted to learning the New Basics. This will require more effective use of the existing day, a longer school day, or a lengthened school year."

More homework should be as-



signed and students should receive "instruction in effective study and work skills," so that they will better use their time.

The Commission makes seven recommendations intended "to improve the preparation of teachers or to make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession..." These include requiring individuals coming into the profession "to meet high educational standards," and to demonstrate "an aptitude for teaching" and "competence in an academic discipline." It recommends higher salaries for teachers so that they are competitive in the market place but ties them to performance. "Salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions should be tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that superior teachers can be rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either improved or terminated."

#### LEADERSHIP NEEDED

The Commission recommends that "citizens across the Nation hold educators and elected officials responsible for providing the leadership necessary to achieve these reforms..."

"Principals and superintendents must play a crucial leadership role in developing school and community support...and school boards must provide them with the professional development and other support required to carry out their leadership role effectively."

In a strong message to parents, the Commission urges them to "help your children understand that excellence in education cannot be achieved without intellectual and moral integrity coupled with hard work and commitment." The Commission ends its report with an exhortation to all of us to take responsibility and act to implement its recommendations.

The National Commission's re-

port was quickly followed by two others. One was from the National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth made up of business, labor and governmental leaders, and educators. The other was from a task force of educators, most from higher education, sponsored by the Twentieth Century Fund, a research foundation. Both support the Commission's message that the nation's economic and intellectual survival and security rest on our ability to reform our system of education and make a national commitment to the attainment of excellence in our schools.

Although we can point with great pride to many individual examples of excellence, Philadelphia faces the same problems as the rest of the nation. The School District has taken a step in the right direction with Superintendent Constance Clayton who has said that she "will insist on only one criterion defining the goal of education -- EXCELLENCE." Since her appointment, she has not only stressed this but acclaimed excellence wherever she has found it.

A great deal of effort is required if competence is to be achieved. Excellence, whether exemplified by winning a mathematics competition or producing a well written report, requires large amounts of concentrated work and practice. Many students have not put forth enough effort to have experienced the satisfaction that accompanies high achievement.

Dr. Clayton with her staff is studying ways to implement the Commission's recommendations. The Board of Education should work in concert with her and others across the nation to develop the public understanding and support that is essential if the necessary reform is to take place. Each of us should be galvanized into taking personal action as well as supporting the initiatives of others who seek to improve the schools.

## BUDGET UPDATE

When the School District settled with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers on August 31, 1982, the contract was based on balancing expenditures against revenue for the three year life of the agreement. Staff reductions based on enrollment decline were built in. Revenue assumptions, considered moderate and reasonable, depended on some growth in taxes and state subsidy but no increase in rate. Expenditure estimates assumed a contract with Local 1201 (bus drivers, custodians, and maintenance people) modeled on the Teachers'.

Unfortunately, there have been changes so that \$20 million in new revenue is now required to balance the budget for 1983-84. A depressed economy led to revenues which did not live up to expectations. A court decision granting Local 1201 a disputed, retroactive 10% salary increase added \$13 million in expenses. Totalling much more than \$20 million, the gap was diminished by reducing spending below projected levels. Superintendent Constance Clayton was successful in effecting millions of dollars in economies in areas

other than direct services to students.

On May 31, 1983, the Board of Education approved its budget, balanced with \$20 million in increased state funding which at the time was a legislative initiative, but not definite. The Board had little choice. The state budget process was incomplete so the outcome could not be known. There is logic in turning to the state for the needed funds, because three-quarters of the existing gap may be attributed to state supported special education which is underfunded by \$15 million. The city, which just raised taxes substantially in an effort to maintain its services, provided no additional funds for the schools. It would be impossible to carry on an educational program, observe contract requirements, and reduce spending by another \$20 million. That leaves increased state funds as the only logical solution. The School District must now strive to secure the necessary additional revenue, stay within its budget, effect more economies, and conduct itself so as to merit public confidence.

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