

the OAKES newsletter

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An Independent Monthly
Dedicated To Improving Public Education

April 1970

The goal of The Oakes Newsletter is to contribute to bringing about improvement in the Philadelphia public schools. System wide changes are essential if the School District is to fulfill its obligations to the students and the City that it serves.

The Oakes Newsletter is an independent publication which will appear every month except July and August. The opinions expressed will be solely my own.

Helen Oakes

Author and Publisher

BUDGET CUTS CREATE CRISIS

"The Public Schools Face Bankruptcy."

"Schools Will Close If..."

"Schools Will Not Open In September If..."

The public has been warned, some would say threatened, again and again of the dire consequences resulting from the financial crisis facing the schools. Yet, each time so far, the schools have remained open and on the surface education seems to be continuing as usual.

A more probing look at the schools reveals many alarming facts.

First, cuts have been made in the budget that are devastating in their effect on the quality of

teaching. The School District has been forced by the financial community to balance its expenditures against its revenues. In so doing, it has abandoned its previously held position that it would not go below a certain floor of educational quality. Thus, it has doomed any possibility for achieving success in teaching the children the skills that they need for successful living.

Second, the financial structure of the School District is very weak. If its total collapse is to be averted, many conditions must be met. Bonds to finance a \$28.6 million operating budget deficit must be sold. The \$15 million supplemental subsidy must be re-appropriated by the State Legislature. City Council must enact taxes to appreciably increase revenue for schools. The nation's economy must, at least, remain at its present level so that the tax yield for the schools will not drop.

Third, the schools are saddled with a \$35 million debt in the operating budget that is going to have to be repaid in the next few years with money that is needed to operate schools.

A full recital of how the School District got into its present predicament would be lengthy and very complicated. However, a significant part of the story is City Council's refusal to face up to its responsibility to adequately fund public education. The Educational Home Rule Charter provides that the Board of

Education shall adopt a lump sum budget at the end of March and then submit it to the Mayor and City Council with a request for authorization to levy taxes to balance the budget. At the end of May, the Board must adopt a budget which balances expenditures against expected revenues.

In the spring of 1968, as required by the Charter, the Board of Education submitted its budget for the following school year to City Council. City Council should have authorized taxes within two months to balance the budget. It took them nine and as a result, the taxes were ruled illegal by the courts. City Council then delayed action again. Finally, in June 1969, they passed a 3% Net Profits Tax on corporations which Council estimated would bring in the \$31 million in new money that was needed. When the tax collection was completed in September, the actual receipts were \$15 million — \$16 million short of the estimate. This, plus the \$7 million deficit from the previous year plus other taxes which had not yielded as expected, brought the deficit, going into this school year, up to a total of \$28 million.

Since the School District did not know until school was in session this year how badly it came out on its budget for last year, there could be no orderly planning for balancing the budget for this school year.

THE BUDGET INCREASES ANNUALLY

New funds will be needed for next year as they have been each school year for the past several. The budget goes up \$30 million or more annually. The major proportion of next year's increase will be due to the following:

1. Salary increases, annual salary increments and employee benefits (excluding costs of teachers' contract

now being negotiated) - \$11.5 million

2. Increased funds for the payment of principal and interest on bonds that fund the building program and the operating budget and for the payment of interest on temporary borrowing - \$15.5 million
3. Inflation - \$.9 million
4. Operating costs of new or expanded facilities - \$1.6 million

Fundamentally, the problem is that more money is required each year and this money is difficult or impossible to secure under present conditions.

CITY, STATE AND FEDERAL SUPPORT NEEDED

Urban public school systems across the country share Philadelphia's desperate financial plight. It is clear that the local and state governments do not have adequate tax resources to support the school systems. Therefore, the federal government must provide substantial support for the day-to-day operations of public education. All three levels of government must contribute tax funds if the public schools are to be saved.

But this will come about only if the elected representatives at all three levels of government accept responsibility for public education. City Council must provide funds for public education as a top city priority thereby accepting their share of the responsibility. The Mayor and City Councilmen must join with the School Board in working to secure increased funding at the state and federal levels.

It will require the efforts of all the people as well as their elected representatives to solve this serious problem. All of us have an equal stake in saving public education. All of us have an equal responsibility to work to make its continued existence possible.

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PROSPECTS FOR FEDERAL SUPPORT

The cost of public education in the nation's largest cities is rising sharply every year and substantial federal financial aid is desperately needed. President Nixon, however, has reduced federal funds to education. The President has set up a commission on school finance, but he failed to recognize the urgency of the problem and gave the commission two full years to study the problem. And yet, according to the following story, the President already has, and is suppressing, a report which recommends massive federal funds for city schools.

"A report on urban education, commissioned by the Nixon Administration but so far kept under wraps by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, sharply conflicts with Administrative policy and recommends a massive new Federal investment in inner city schools.

"The report which was completed last month, stresses that education, not welfare payments to the poor, is the long term solution to the problems of the cities.

"The report was compiled by the department's Urban Education Task Force. The chairman was Wilson Riles, California's deputy superintendent of public instruction. Mr. Riles recommended that the report be made public.

"Representative Jeffrey Cohelan, Democrat of California, obtained a copy of the report, inserted it in the Congressional Record and called on the department to make the document available to educators and the public.

"He charged that the report had been officially suppressed because it contradicts President Nixon's budget recommendations for education.

"The report recommends an in-

vestment by the Federal Government of \$470-million in urban schools in 1971 and calls for a Federal outlay of from \$7-billion to \$14-billion for urban schools by 1974.

"Without adequate funding, the report says, there is no hope for effective education in the nation's cities.

"The report specifically calls on the Federal Government to reduce inner city class sizes sharply and to begin small group remedial educational programs."

-From the New York Times
of February 22, 1970.

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NEW PRIORITIES NEEDED

The most important goals of public education in Philadelphia today should be to vastly increase the number of students who master reading and arithmetic skills and who develop the facility to express their thoughts verbally and in writing. The School District should place a priority on these goals with the top priority placed on reading.

Goals and priorities are meaningless unless they are matched with money and personnel to change them from targets on paper to concrete achievements. If the School District wants its students to learn to read, it must provide teachers with the skills, assistants and materials to do the job. This requires greatly increased allocations of funds which have not been made to date.

It is very clear that reading is not a top priority in Philadelphia. A simple way to prove this is to examine the 1970 Directory of The School District of Philadelphia. Reading comes under the Department of English-Language Arts which consists of 5 people. Only 3 of the 5 devote all their time to reading and they have the responsibility for

improving reading instruction throughout the system. In contrast to this, the Directory lists 11 to 16 people in the Departments of Art, Music and Physical Education. Does the School District consider reading to be only 1/3 to 1/2 as important as art, music and physical education? The evidence points strongly to that conclusion. Another important conclusion is that 3 people is a totally inadequate number to do the job with reading that must be done.

There is a direct relationship between priorities, budget allocations and sufficient revenue for education. The public has a responsibility to support the Board of Education in its quest for money to run our schools. However, the public also has a right to participate in important budgetary decisions, because it is through the vehicle of the budget that programs are adopted or discarded and thus priorities are or are not

carried out. Public participation must occur during the development of the budget or on the occasion of cuts or increases in the budget. These are the times when priorities are weighed and the important fundamental decisions are made. These are the times when the public must be in a position to insist that reading be made a top priority. By the time that the budget appears in print, it is much too late. The important decisions have been made and a long complex document has been built on them.

Public participation must come in the budget development process. The public and school staff members must hammer the budget out together. Only in this way can the public be assured that the announced School District priorities and the community's priorities will be implemented in the planned expenditures for the following year.

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COMING ISSUES:

- May - Reading: Successes and failures in Philadelphia; School District commitment to reading.
- June - Teachers' contract demands; teacher accountability.

Subscription - \$ 3.00 a year

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6400 Drexel Road
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the OAKES newsletter

An Independent Monthly Dedicated To Improving Public Education

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May 1970

READING

DIMENSIONS OF THE FAILURE

In the fall of 1966, Philadelphia public school children were given national standardized tests. It was then that the City learned, for the first time, that thousands of public school children were not learning to read. In the five school districts comprising all of the inner city, the average scores in reading, at all grade levels tested, were 8 months to almost 2 years below national averages. Two school years later, tests of reading achievement showed the children had lost ground. A year after that, in the spring of 1969, reading test scores showed a further decline in achievement.

The importance and seriousness of the reading deficiency of Philadelphia public school children can not be overstated. It leads directly, and often inevitably, to failure in school, to truancy, to dropping out, to hostility against society, and to delinquency. An individual lacking reading skills in the 1970's is doomed to filling low paying, unskilled jobs or to joblessness. It is an intolerable handicap to the individual and extracts a terrible price from society.

* * * * *

WHAT IS READING?

Many people think of reading simply as the conversion of the printed symbols into words. Read-

ing is much more than that. It includes:

1. Understanding the meaning of the printed words,
2. Being able to draw inferences,
3. Developing a vocabulary that permits comprehension of the printed page,
4. Study skills such as picking out main ideas, outlining, taking notes from a book or lecture,
5. Knowing how to use a dictionary, an encyclopedia or other reference material,
6. An appreciation of literature,
7. Being able to read at different speeds depending on the material being read.

Success in all school subjects depends in great part on mastery of the skill of reading. The child who can read a page aloud, but can not understand it needs help. The student who reads a chapter of history and then can not find the answers to the questions at the end of the chapter needs help also. So does the student in a science course who can not figure out which are the important facts that he must learn. These reading skills should be developed all through elementary and secondary school. They are best taught from the earliest years as an integral part of English, social studies, science, mathematics or whatever the content area is.

All students, whatever their potential or proven ability, can benefit from good, consistent reading instruction from pre-school through 12th grade. All schools, not just inner city schools, will serve their students better if reading instruction is improved city-wide.

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ACTION IS NEEDED

The problem of students with serious reading deficiencies is monumental and of tremendous importance. It has not been so treated by the Board of Education or the Administration. They have given the problem lip service and developed plans on paper, but action, which is the only thing that will help the students, has not followed.

The Board of Education got on the verbal band wagon February 24, 1970 when it passed a resolution which says, "Resolved, that the School District of Philadelphia shall place the highest priority on a concentrated effort to improve reading achievement on all levels of the school system..." No such effort has materialized.

It is true that there is a 91 page book titled The School District of Philadelphia, System for Reading Improvement for the 70's, Progress Report No.1, March 1970. This is the beginning of an excellent blueprint for action, but it has not been adopted by the Board of Education yet so, at the moment, it represents nothing more than an escalation of expectation.

A vitally important step toward improving reading instruction would be a substantial increase in the staff serving citywide. If the School District really placed "the highest priority" on reading, this reading staff would have been expanded already, financial crisis or not. The job to be done includes developing leadership in reading in-

struction at the individual school and district level, providing staff development programs, supplying resource services, working with local colleges and universities, disseminating the latest reading information to teachers in the field and furnishing assistance to schools trying to improve their programs of reading instruction. At present, there are three people to do all of the above. While they are tremendously dedicated, it is impossible for them to make even a good beginning on that long list of responsibilities.

NO NEW FUNDS REQUIRED

There are things that could have been done to improve reading instruction for September 1970, if this was truly a School District goal, without spending one penny extra. For example, the Board of Education is giving fellowship grants of \$750 to 800 teachers this summer. The grants are going to teachers taking 6 semester hours in approved courses related to what they are currently teaching. The grants should have gone to 800 teachers wishing to take the 6 semester hours in reading. Then the investment of more than half a million dollars would have meshed with the February 24 resolution and had a big impact on improving reading instruction. A second similar example is the federal funds being granted to schools submitting the best proposals for changing "the school's educational structure to better fit the needs of its students." The goal for the schools' proposals should have been an improved reading program and the awards should have been given to schools submitting the best proposals for fulfilling this purpose.

A third important way that reading instruction could be improved within present expenditures would be to use some of the reading specialists in the high schools differently. In 20 of the 22 high schools, all of the reading specialists spend all,

or almost all, of their time instructing small groups of poor readers. Thus, each teacher can help 75 students per year at the most, and the schools with the largest staffs can reach 300 students. Meanwhile, there are ten times that many students that need help. If 2 reading specialists in each school were assigned to work with teachers, instead of with students, improved reading instruction for 3000 students could result in one year's time. In addition to making it possible for two people to extend their special skills to helping 3000 instead of 150, reading instruction would gradually become a part of the teaching in every subject area. This is in accord with present School District policy. Every teacher should know how to help students to read for meaning, to develop vocabulary, to outline, etc. whether he is teaching commerce, English, home economics, mathematics, social studies or whatever.

A PROGRAM WITH SERIOUS FLAWS

The School District has acted on one program which it purports will improve reading achievement at the high school level. An in depth examination of the program, however, shows that it has very serious weaknesses. A mandate was issued in April that every high school will have from 5 to 9 teachers teaching remedial reading next year. On the surface, this may seem to be a sound emergency measure for remedying high school students' reading problems, but the program would require adding about 75 remedial reading teachers city-wide. There is little hope of recruiting that many qualified, trained people for these positions for September.

It is possible that teachers who have had some course work in reading and are anxious to work with students in the area of reading could do a creditable job if they had intensive summer work

followed by careful supervision and support next year. But, as of May 1, the teachers have not been selected, no summer training has been scheduled and there have been no provisions made for giving these "remedial reading" teachers the necessary supervision and support.

The School District would probably point to the \$1.4 million being recommended in the Operating Budget for improving pre-school and elementary school reading programs as action taken in keeping with the February 24 resolution. However, there are still no specific plans as to how this money is to be used so, to date, this is just another example of words but no action.

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CHILDREN ARE LEARNING TO READ

There is one school in Philadelphia that has stopped losing ground and has started to pick up momentum toward closing the gap between its achievement scores and the average achievement scores for the nation. It is a typical school with average size classes, average teachers and average amounts of equipment and materials. Therefore, duplicating its accomplishments elsewhere would not require increased spending.

The school is the L.P.Hill School, 32nd and Ridge Avenue in the heart of District 4. At the Hill School, the principal, Mr. Oscar Goss decided some years ago that the children who came to his school were of average intelligence like children elsewhere and that they could and would learn to read. Mr. Goss does not accept failure from his teachers or his pupils. His school is geared for success in what he considers the all important business of teaching children to read and to do arithmetic.

The L.P.Hill School is a large inner city elementary school enrolling more than 1400 children. Many come from backgrounds of poverty and most are black. There are children at Hill, as elsewhere, burdened with

problems. The faculty has a nucleus of experienced teachers but like other schools there are many new young teachers on the staff and there is a high annual turnover of teachers.

Yet Hill is succeeding where other schools are failing. Its Iowa test scores have showed steady improvement at all grade levels since 1966 contrasting sharply with the city averages which have worsened each year. It is hoped and expected that this year's Iowa Tests will show Hill School at the average achievement level for Philadelphia and that by 1972 it will have attained the national average.

The formula for Hill School's progress in reading could be widely adopted. Some of its important components are:

1. Reading achievement is the top priority and the principal has made this clear to his staff.
2. The progress of each grade and each child is followed by the principal. Mr. Goss has two long walls in his office covered with charts. One shows

the school's progress, grade by grade each year and the other lists every teacher and every child in his class. The chart has space for five pieces of information per year about each child's progress in reading: where the child is in October, where the teacher expects him to be in January, where he actually is in January, where the teacher expects him to be in June and where he actually is in June.

3. The principal expects at least a year's progress in reading for a year in school and any teacher who expects less or gets less will be closely questioned as to the reason. Thus, teachers are held accountable for the progress of the children in their classes.
4. Modern and varied methods are used to teach reading.

Mr. Goss has sparked, spear-headed and led this drive for reading achievement in his school and he and his staff merit commendation for their accomplishments.

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COMING IN JUNE ISSUE: Teachers' contract demands; teacher accountability.

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An Independent Monthly Dedicated To Improving Public Education
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TEACHERS' CONTRACT

Even a cursory reading of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' 469 proposals for changes in its contract with the Board of Education would anger most people who are concerned about public education. The demands include: shorter hours, fewer minutes of teaching per week, excessive overtime rates for every hour outside the shortened working day and stringent limitations on the way individual schools and the system as a whole can operate. In the context of the severe financial limitations facing public education, shorter hours and high overtime rates can only mean children will learn even less. Spelling out policies and programs in dozens of contract items severely limits needed flexibility, limits the range of solutions that can be adopted to solve problems, and delivers into the hands of the Union policy and decision making that should be retained by the School Administration and the Board of Education.

The present "Agreement Between the Board of Education of the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, Local 3, American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO" runs from September 1, 1968 to August 31, 1970. This is the third contract between the parties. It is a long document of more than 450 points organized under 32 articles with headings such as, "Conditions Applicable to All Teachers," "Salaries," "Welfare Benefits,"

"Class Size," "Summer Schools." It is outrageous that on top of this detailed, lengthy contract come 469 new demands!

This view of the contract demands is not to be construed as an attack on the teaching profession. We are, after all, totally dependent on teachers practicing their craft in the classroom in such a way that children learn. It is in the public interest to properly compensate competent teachers with financial rewards, respect and appreciation. It is only when the profession attracts the best people, and keeps them, that we are moving toward what is educationally best for children.

Teachers' salaries should be increased in order to continue to be competitive with surrounding school districts and other large cities, and to compete successfully with other professions for top people.

TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY

Teachers' ability to produce learning in children should increase concurrently. The concept of holding teachers accountable for what their students learn should become a part of School District thinking. In time, salary increases should be linked to performance. To date, surprisingly, there has been no School District study of how teacher accountability (responsibility for the learning of children) could be made to work equitably and effectively.

Accountability is one of the factors that accounts for the success

of the L.P.Hill Elementary School (See May Newsletter) in raising the level of reading achievement of its students. The principal expects a year's progress in reading from each teacher for each child. The children are tested three times a year so that teachers know what their students are learning. The principal also follows each child's progress. Teachers are held responsible for the progress of their students. This forces everyone to focus on what children learn and how learning is brought about.

"MASTER TEACHERS" NEEDED

At present, beginning teachers, entering the System with a BA degree, start at \$7300, move to \$7630 the second year, and to \$8290 the third year. The schedule gives a small increase to the beginning teacher at the end of one year, but substantially higher increments after that. This is sound because it rewards the teacher who stays in teaching and becomes more proficient after the second year. The increases continue annually for ten years until a teacher reaches \$12,000 which is as far as he can go unless he earns further degrees. A teacher with a Doctorate and 10 years of teaching receives the top teaching salary of \$14,700.

One very serious weakness of present School District policy is that there is no opportunity for a gifted teacher to assume additional responsibility and receive substantially increased compensation without leaving the classroom and going into administration. Administrative salaries start where teachers' salaries end. To move ahead is to move out of the classroom. What is needed are new teaching positions, in the administrative salary range, for highly skilled teachers who would combine instruction of children with training of incoming teachers

and para-professionals.

There is a great need to train student teachers, interns and new teachers. Talented, experienced teachers should be doing this job in cooperation with teacher training institutions. An excellent 30 page report "A Program to Improve the Performance of New Teachers in the Philadelphia School System,"* by Peter L. Battenwieser, completed in February 1970, details the problems faced by, and caused by, 1500 to 2000 new teachers coming into the School System annually. This report documents the need for gifted teachers to work with incoming teachers at different points in their training so that when they have sole responsibility for a group of students, they have the competence and the confidence to succeed in their teaching role.

A revised salary schedule for "master teachers" paralleling administrative salaries would demonstrate the School System's commitment to increased learning made possible by improved teaching.

CONTRACT DEMANDS

Two important items in the contract proposals** would shorten school hours for children and teaching time for teachers. "The work day for all teachers" would be "from 8:45 to 2:30," thereby cutting an hour off the elementary school day. It would continue the high school day, as at present, short of its state mandated length. A teacher would be "required to teach no more than twenty 45-minute periods (900 minutes) per week." This is applied to all teachers at all levels

* Copies available by contacting Mr. Herbert Hazan, Rm. 218, Adm. Bldg., Parkway at 21st, Phila., Pa. 19103.

** "Approved Proposals for Contract IV," The Reporter, February 1970. Published by Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, 1930 Chestnut St., Phila., Pa. 19103.

and works out to 3 hours of teaching per day. This leaves the elementary school child in school $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours each day, but with his teacher teaching him only 3 of those $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours! There is no explanation as to how the Union proposes to educate children within the context of these demands.

An aspect of the contract that requires very careful consideration is the many proposals that place the School District in a straight jacket of lock step procedures, policies and programs. Two examples:

1. "Faculty and organization meetings shall be limited to one every two weeks and half of this time shall be for staff development." - The number of faculty meetings, if they occur within the regular working day, should not be limited by the contract and their use should certainly not be spelled out. Schools have different needs at different times.

2. "The Department Head shall have prime responsibility for the professional development of the teachers in his department. Other personnel with supervisory responsibilities shall work with teachers only through the Department Head." This may be the best way in some situations and the worst in others.

The demands also include provisions that involve far reaching policy decisions. Such decisions should not be made in secret by union-management negotiators. They should be made by the Board of Education or the Administration in public. Some should involve wide discussion by professionals and the community. Some examples:

1. The contract calls for reducing "low ability or low achievement classes" to "12 pupils for the purpose of permitting as much individualized instruction as possible..." This is one way of getting at the problem. Another way would be to

assign para-professionals (teacher assistants) to work with each teacher. By this method, the ratio of adult to student could be reduced to less than 12 to 1 for part, or all of the day, for the same cost. In any case, the solution to the problem should not be mandated by an inflexible contract.

2. "There shall be a transitional class between kindergarten and first grade for those children who are not yet ready for first grade." - If this is to be, it should be a Board of Education decision based on the Superintendent's recommendation.

3. "When necessary such pupils" (as underachievers, emotionally disturbed, disciplinary or otherwise disruptive children, attendance problems, etc.) "shall be assigned to small classes (no more than ten pupils) within their schools or in other schools conveniently located to the pupil involved where classes shall be conducted in the regular curriculum..." - A policy change of this nature should not be a subject for secret negotiations.

The economic demands contained in the 469 items would raise the present payroll for 13,500 teachers and other non-administrative employees \$200 to \$700 million above the present \$140 million. Some of the demands that account for the whopping estimate are:

1. Salary increases amounting to about 50% and costing more than \$80 million annually.

2. Substantial reduction in maximum class size.

3. Great increases in supportive services, para-professionals to relieve teachers of all non-teaching duties, and secretarial help.

4. Sabbatical leave at full pay to be granted for any reason after seven years of service.

5. Extra-curricular pay (based on .0015 annual salary per hour) for

before and after school activities. The minimum extra-curricular rate would be \$16.20 per hour. The present rate is not tied to an annual salary and is \$9 per hour for all teachers.

There is absolutely no way to determine which are the priority economic items in the document of Union proposals. To read the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' Contract demands is to wonder how such a conglomeration, containing so many extreme proposals, could have been arrived at. The explanation lies in the procedure followed by the Union. Proposals for this contract were solicited from the Union Membership. Committees went over the proposals, but only to eliminate duplicate or contradictory proposals, and to reword where necessary. No attempt was made in committee to reconcile demands with reality and reason. On January 16, 1970, all of the proposals were submitted to a Union Membership Meeting. No overall recommendations were made to the membership, to be accepted or rejected by the 700 teachers attending. Obviously, hundreds of people can not take a list of several hundred items and make it into a meaningful document in an evening.

UNION AND BOARD OF EDUCATION MUST BE CALLED TO ACCOUNT

The time has come for teachers to call their bargaining agent,

the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers to account. This contract is being negotiated for teachers and they share responsibility for the proposals. No teachers' group has spoken out for the need to determine priorities among the demands, nor has any teachers' group been publicly critical of the demands.

The time has also come for parents and community to call their bargaining agent, the Board of Education to account. What are its goals in this contract? The Board apparently plans to increase compensation to teachers which is as it should be. However, will the Board refuse to shorten the school day? Will it retain its right to run schools in cooperation with teachers and all other interested parties with policy and program decisions made in public?

No one should forget that to wait to meet with the Board of Education until the Union and the Board come to agreement is to give up all possibility of influencing the outcome of the negotiations. It should also be remembered that since the School District faces desperate financial problems, it can give the Union only a minimum financial settlement. This will tremendously increase the pressure to give the Union shorter hours and more control. If the community lines up with the Board of Education, it will strengthen the Board's resolve and its ability to resist the Union pressure.

-June 2

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