

APPROVED  
17-1986

Rockville, Maryland  
March 26, 1986

The Board of Education of Montgomery County met in special session at the Carver Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on Wednesday, March 26, 1986, at 8:40 p.m.

ROLL CALL      Present: Dr. James E. Cronin, President  
                  in the Chair  
                  Mrs. Sharon DiFonzo  
                  Mr. Blair G. Ewing  
                  Dr. Jeremiah Floyd  
                  Mr. John D. Foubert  
                  Mrs. Marilyn J. Praisner  
                  Dr. Robert E. Shoenberg  
                  Mrs. Mary Margaret Slye

Absent: None

Others Present: Dr. Wilmer S. Cody, Superintendent of Schools  
                  Dr. Harry Pitt, Deputy Superintendent  
                  Mr. Thomas S. Fess, Parliamentarian

Re: ANNUAL MEETING WITH MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Dr. Cronin welcomed the members of the MCEA executive board and stated that he hoped this would be the first of a number of ways that they could hear the voice of the teachers.

Mr. Mark Simon hoped that they could set an optimistic tone for the meeting because frequently the only communication between the Board and the teachers had been on the pages of newspapers. He said there was a perception that the Board did not consider the wants and needs of its employees. He explained that the theme of this meeting was one of employee participation in the decision-making process as a route to improved morale. He said that they had built a very effective structure for representing their membership, and he wanted to take some time to talk about their survey of their membership. He noted that there were some issues recently which could have been dealt with more collaboratively including starting pay for teachers, E2, and supports for new hires. In the case of new hires, teachers had some good ideas about that which were being fleshed out in a joint committee.

Mr. Simon stated that even on issues where they were going to disagree he felt that exploring those issues was a useful process. He pointed out that MCEA could help the Board in making arguments to the public, the County Council, and the county executive. He said that they had testified before the County Council this evening and were supportive of the Board and its budget.

In regard to the survey, Mr. Simon said he had given each Board member a packet with a summary of the results. He saw six issues

highlighted by these results. He said that 55 percent of the teachers indicated that if given a choice they would not go into teaching, 50 percent felt morale was low, and 40 percent were seriously considering leaving the profession. He indicated that the superintendent had put out a press release on the low numbers of teachers actually leaving in the last several years, but he felt that these figures did not negate the concerns raised by the survey. They were concerned about the future and the ability of MCPS to attract teachers when 40 percent of their teachers were seriously considering leaving. He did not believe that past statistics predicted the future and stated that the figure 40 percent was an indication of how people felt about their jobs. He disputed the superintendent's interpretation of the data where he said there was no problem.

Ms. Phyllis Cochran commented that the conclusion that all was well because only 2.7 percent of the teachers left the profession was erroneous. She said there were lots of reasons why they did not leave, but she thought that in six or seven years they would see a serious exodus of teachers because all was not well. She said that while they liked their tenure and benefits, there were problems with morale. She said that she had taught in the system for 23 years and was a product of MCPS. She was concerned about curriculum overload because all they did was add on and never take away. She taught in a school where they did well, but they paid a price for this. She said that she was a good teacher, but she hurt and she was just one teacher. She was concerned about paperwork and planning time. While they had made improvements in class size, they did need to keep pushing on other issues.

Dr. Cronin inquired about curriculum overload and planning time. Ms. Cochran explained that as a third grade teacher she was particularly concerned about the language arts program. She had to follow a script because if she did not, her students would not do well on the criterion-referenced tests. Previously she could pick and choose from the curriculum and be creative. She felt that she was not the teacher she once was because she was not allowed to be. She said that the curriculum was too much, and her three hours of planning time was taken up by meetings with curriculum specialists. She commented that the curriculum was written so tightly that it took the teacher out of teaching.

Ms. Phyllis Robinson stated that as a first grade teacher she felt that same frustration. She was particularly concerned about the specialists who wanted to integrate everything into the curriculum, and she was not sure that these specialists ever got together to see the total demands they were placing on the classroom teacher. As a 20-year veteran, she was concerned about the effect of all of this on the first or second year teacher. She felt inundated by curriculum guides and the lack of support.

Dr. Shoenberg commented that he expected that this response was real. It was a question of very complex curriculum guides combined with specialists who visited with a concern that everything in their piece of the curriculum got addressed. This in some way created a

situation in which they felt they could not be their own person as a teacher. He did not think the Board members knew how to address this as a policy matter, and he wondered how they could address this operationally.

Ms. Jane Stern stated that having been out of the schools for two years she was concerned when she returned. She suggested that they start with using their influence on the state Board of Education regarding curriculum mandates. For example, social studies and citizenship issues had introduced "Trivial Pursuit" into the curriculum. Instead of concentrating on the ability to listen to a candidate and decide about the candidate's views on an issue, they were drilling on trivia that students would never use as citizens.

Mr. Simon suggested that teachers be given the opportunity to buy into a new program and be given time prior to the opening of school in September. He said that teachers needed more planning time to be able to prepare particularly when they were dealing with curriculum modifications. He noted that a high percentage of elementary school teachers had listed planning time as a high priority, and 58 percent of the teachers cited infringements on the planning time they had. In addition, teachers wanted time to work with other teachers because the structure of the work day isolated teachers. As a consequence, teachers were reinventing the wheel and not receiving information about students from other teachers.

Dr. Shoenberg remarked that in the past there had been several programs resisted by the community. He happened to like team teaching which they no longer had when they put walls up in the classrooms. He called attention to the teams working together in the middle school situation. However, this did not address the issue of the high school where the structure kept teachers very isolated.

Ms. Stern stated that just taking a wall down did not mean teaming. If the teachers did not have time to consult, all that resulted was being colleagues in crowd control. Dr. Shoenberg reported that his children had attended an open space school where that kind of interaction worked quite well, not for all students, but for most students. He said the problem came when the school closed at noon on Monday for teachers to work together because parents saw that as a problem. He knew that with a principal and a group of teachers wanting this kind of a program it could work.

Mr. Jim Politis reported that his daughter had attended Stedwick where she had had an excellent program in an open space school. He was always amazed at the number of hours these teachers put in to make their program work, but he did not know how long they could expect people to be willing to do that. As the school grew older, the program began to erode. People felt they wanted to go home at 4:30, and there was not enough time to do the centers and cooperative planning.

In regard to the survey, Dr. Cody said there was a concern that he had issued a report on the decline in the number of teacher

resignations. He said that there was an ingredient that was not noted, but he found the survey results to be alarming and very disturbing. He began to scramble to see whether there was any other information in the school system that would validate these results. He wanted to find out who was leaving, and what came out was a dramatic decline. He said that something appeared to be getting better unless there was some other totally different explanation. Another troubling aspect of this was because the survey results did not come to him to work out improvements, they went to the public. He did not know whether the survey results were valid because of the cover letter stating that the results of the survey were needed for negotiations. Mr. Simon replied that there was no cover letter for teachers, but there was a cover letter to representatives.

Dr. Cody said they had made the survey a public issue and should not expect him to sit back if he had some other kind of information giving a different impression. Dr. Cronin commented that MCEA had put its finger on something endemic to the teaching profession K to college. He thought they were talking about upgrading the status of teachers in the country and in Montgomery County.

Dr. Cody said he was troubled by the impact the various requirements were having on the ability of teachers to perform their tasks in an effective and rewarding manner. He had heard this in other meetings and from principals as well. He recalled that in a meeting last fall one teacher had said the problem was that the K-8 curriculum was overwhelming and another had said the problem was not the curriculum but the way it was being implemented. Ms. Cochran suggested that they needed to go back and let the professional use what the

professional wanted to use. The curriculum guides would be tools rather than a script to follow.

Mr. Charles Barkley stated that the teachers were saying that no one was listening to them. He suggested going to the schools and asking the teachers for their views. Dr. Shoenberg pointed out that the curriculum was written by teachers and tested by teachers. Ms. Robinson commented that when the curriculum was piloted the supports were there which made all the difference. Dr. Shoenberg agreed that this was a problem, and Dr. Cody added that it was for this reason they had put about \$1 million in the budget for training.

Ms. Marsha Smith noted that everything had to be implemented and there was no support for the individual teacher. Some suggestions had been made about increasing planning time but not necessarily during the school day although that was probably the best way. She pointed out that there was time in the summer when colleagues could get together to talk about problems, but that time was going into developing more curriculum.

Dr. Cronin asked if they ever analyzed the budget as to how the money was actually spent. He said that money was put in for planning and materials, and he wondered whether they analyzed this to see whether it was used for this purpose.

Mr. Ewing stated that he thought there might be ways to have all teachers participate in some fashion. There were examples in large bureaucracies which demonstrated how participation could be achieved. They had to figure out what kind of participation, at what level, and for what decisions. He thought they ought to work on this. Unless they were able to move from the authoritarian structure of public education to one that involved much more consultation, they would not address the issue of morale. He would like them to find a way to work on that issue. MCEA spoke for teachers, but on occasion they resented it if anyone wanted to speak to teachers. The school system took the view that it could not concede an inch in terms of its authority and responsibility. He said there were ways that would assure participation and retain for managers the right to set goals and the right to hold people accountable. He said there was a federal agency called the Bureau of Labor/Management Relations in the Department of Labor which worked with school systems on participation.

Mr. Simon said that while he would not close that off, his response to the concern was that there was only one way to implement that kind of participation. This was to have structures that were representative because they were elected. He explained they had liaison committees in every school, but they had a number of schools where the principal was not meeting regularly with the committee even though it is a requirement of the agreement.

This year they had a dramatic improvement in the situation. He said that this was a model that was an ideal framework to accomplish this end. He said what

he would like from the Board was a sense that there was an understanding of what the liaison committees were trying to do and a commitment to really help that structure work. He thought that if this structure were implemented with a good faith effort on both sides it could be effective.

Mr. Ewing thought the issue was that people did not want to lose control. He did not want them to lose control either. He wanted the principals to have authority and the right to hold teachers accountable for their performance. What was crucial was whether or not they could figure out a way within the liaison committee or outside of it to assure that people were asked the kinds of questions that they could answer to get the job done more efficiently and more effectively. If the liaison committees were going to address themselves to the issue of wresting control from the principal, that would be the end of it.

Dr. Cronin said that in talking with teacher representatives very often the liaison committee was effective in terms of deciding some of the basic contract issues. He asked how the liaison committee would help a third grade teacher with the curriculum. Mr. Simon replied that the committee dealt with structural things that needed to be implemented in that school so that the third grade teacher could read the curriculum.

Dr. Cody commented that the liaison committee functioned to protect

the teacher's rights so that they could do what they were supposed to do as opposed to quality circles in which the faculty and principal would get together and define objectives and problems to be solved.

Dr. Cronin remarked that this was a full agenda, and if they did not get through the agenda the Board would be open to written comments. In addition, MCEA could come to the Board table. Mrs. Praisner did not think that these were necessarily issues for the Board table. Some of the issues were cooperation in Annapolis and at the State Board of Education. One issue was how they could work together if they had a shared position. She felt that MSTA had a cooperative working arrangement with MABE. For example, both MCEA and the Board were opposed to the home study bill.

Mrs. Praisner pointed out that they had a number of issues coming up, and it would be useful to have discussion with MCEA on such items as honors courses. In addition, they would be looking at Richard Montgomery High School, up-county programs, the vocational-technical program, and the 2+2 issue in connection with Montgomery College. They would be opening up two new high schools, and they might talk about the creative organization of these schools.

Mr. Simon suggested the possibility of scheduling a continuing meeting with the members of the Board and suggested one in the near future. Dr. Shoenberg said it was also possible for a couple of Board members and a group of teachers to sit down and discuss specific topics. Mr. Simon pointed out that when they got together they were not just a group of teachers. In these discussions they tried to do their homework and reflect the sentiment of their 6,500 colleagues.

Dr. Floyd stated that he was interested in the role of the teacher specialist, and when Mrs. Cochran was speaking he got the impression they were imposing instructional techniques on teachers without their willing cooperation. It troubled him to think they might treat a 23-year veteran in the same way as a beginning teacher. He hoped that the teacher specialists were working with teachers in a collegial manner. He asked if teacher specialists had a well defined role which they understood and which classroom teachers understood. He also inquired about the supervision provided to teacher specialists. Mr. Simon suggested that they discuss this at their next meeting. Dr. Floyd recalled that they had added to these positions because they believed teacher specialists were strengthening the instructional program.

In regard to the survey, Mr. Simon believed that it was done meticulously. They were concerned about the risk they were taking with the kinds of questions they were asking and the lack of specific preparation of their members. Given the national climate and discussions in the county, they felt they could take that risk. He emphasized that they did nothing from the office to affect the results of the survey. They did have assistance from NEA in regard to the wording of the questions. If there were concerns, he would like to get together with Dr. Cody and his research people.

Dr. Cody said he might have linked two things together. He accepted that the cover memo did not go with the surveys, but he did not know the extent to which the building representatives used that memo to get teachers to fill out the survey. However, if even only 20 percent felt this way, it was a concern. If they were going to collect this information and make it part of a public discussion, they had to expect that he would do the same thing.

Mr. Ewing commented that he had done a lot of surveys, and there was no such thing as an absolutely valid survey. What was reasonable was for them to be as well satisfied as they could about the methodology and the outcome. They were all agreed that there was a problem, and they all agreed that they wanted to try to address that problem.

Mrs. Praisner suggested that they should get beyond arguing about the process used and get to working on solving the problem. Dr. Shoenberg commented that they were not going to get any place by creating pieces of information for public relations purposes and by addressing each other through the public media.

Dr. Cronin remarked that the two groups had the opportunity to begin the partnership they were talking about. What they started this evening would begin to change perceptions of people in the schools. If employees were hurting, they had to do something to help them. He hoped there would be trust so that they could begin to work out a partnership.

Mrs. DiFonzo stated that they needed to get out of the confrontational mode. She said that Mr. Simon had spoken about being responsive to his membership, but she pointed out that the Board members were not just a group of eight people talking to MCEA. They were being pushed by the County Council, MCCPTA, the State Board of Education, and the courts. While the Board members wished to be as cooperative as they could, they also needed to be mutually responsive and respectful of other forces outside of the Board and MCEA.

Re: ADJOURNMENT

The president adjourned the meeting at 10:25 p.m.

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President

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Secretary

WSC:mlw

