



Dr. Vance explained that they planned to work with the state superintendent and state Board of Education to allow for greater authority for local decisions on the school calendar. In Montgomery County they built in five days above the state minimum of 180 days, and in view of the weather pattern they might have to look at building more snow days into the calendar. In response to a question about the extended school day, Mrs. Gemberling replied that they were trying to allow local staff to decide on the best use of the time; however, some decisions such as transportation and athletic events would have to be made systemwide. They also had to look at the issue of morning and afternoon kindergarten. It was decided that MCPS would provide information to the Spotlight on the extended school day.

Mrs. King inquired about the status of the task force on year-round education. Dr. Vance replied they had been busy with the eastern area boundary decisions and were now ready to begin discussing the profile of the year-round education task force. He assured Mrs. King that MCCPTA would be represented on the task force. Mrs. King stated that they were pleased with the presentation on year-round education at their delegate assembly meeting. She felt it was important for people to understand what year-round education was, whether or not MCPS did anything about it. Dr. Vance agreed and explained that their purpose was to review year-round education and analyze it for Montgomery County.

Mr. Terry Roche reported that at the end of January at a full delegate meeting MCCPTA had adopted a compact for the FY 1995 operating budget. This had been sent to Board members, and he would like to discuss the six items with the Board to get a sense of what the Board had done about these items or intended to do about them. The first one was to modify the way in which future employee contracts were negotiated to assure greater public accountability. Mr. Roche pointed out that 90 percent of the operating budget was determined by negotiations which took place out of the public eye. What they had in mind was open negotiations, and he wanted to know the Board's thoughts on how to make contract negotiations more publicly accountable.

Mrs. Fanconi commented that the Board as a whole had not discussed the MCCPTA compact; however, Board members might wish to respond as individuals.

Mr. Ewing remarked that there was nothing in the law that said negotiations could not be done in public. The difficulty with public negotiations was he was not sure they would ever reach agreement with any of the unions. He explained that the purpose of management was to keep pay increases to a reasonable size and not lose management prerogatives. Unions wanted to maximize the opportunity for improvements in wages and salaries and working conditions and to encroach on management prerogatives. If negotiations were open, the ability of both sides to maximize

their own interests would be greatly reduced. At one point, the Board decided it would participate directly in the bargaining process, but this was not a success. The Board members who attended bargaining sessions were challenged by other Board members about their presence and whether or not they were reporting information back to the Board accurately. This created dissention and did not improve the process. It seemed to him that instead of open negotiations, they should look to letting the public know more about what the issues were, what both parties cared about, and what the public ought to be interested in.

Mr. Ewing pointed out that the Board had the same problems as any large organization. For example, health care costs were up, and this issue came up during negotiations. He suspected that a lot of information could be public, but he did not think open negotiations were the best way to let the public know what was at stake. He also commented that accountability came for the Board at election time which was the ultimate form of accountability. He thought that they did have an obligation to inform the public better about these issues.

Ms. Gutierrez remarked that negotiations were quite complex because of legal constraints and a long history of labor/management relations. She thought the Board was ultimately very accountable when the results of the contracts became public. If the public was not happy with the contracts the Board was agreeing to, the ultimate public responsibility was in the election of the Board members. She did not know about other groups that did have public negotiations, but at one point they had tried to accelerate the negotiations process to make it more in line with the budget process.

Ms. Mona Signer said that open negotiations was a broad term that could run the gamut of having cameras in the room to having a public observer. What they were talking about was a better way of making the proposals and counterproposals known to the public.

She noted that the Carroll County Board of Education had opened up its negotiations process. MCEA's Advocate stated their positions in negotiations, but no one knew the Board's position.

The public perception was the Board was being whipsawed by the unions. Ms. Gutierrez replied that according to the negotiations laws, the Board had all the power in the world. The unions could say all they wanted, but the ultimate decisions, whether there was mediation or negotiations or not, rested with the Board.

Dr. Cheung commented that from a management and labor relationship perspective, they were dealing with three employee units and they did not negotiate with them at the same time. While they had common interests, the unions also had demands unique to their unit. During negotiations there was a give and take, and for accountability they had to look at the outcomes

within the contracts. By looking at the contracts, the public could evaluate whether or not the Board had done its job.

Mrs. Fanconi pointed out that the discussion about negotiations was the first of a six-part question, and she wondered how much time MCCPTA planned to spend on this. Mr. Roche commented that MCCPTA had come to this compact with a great degree of seriousness and a lot of frustration about the way the Board had done business in the fiscal area over the last several years. Mrs. Fanconi pointed out that as a Board they had not discussed the compact, and it might be appropriate to schedule a separate meeting to talk about the compact. Mrs. King agreed that they should not cover all the questions this evening and suggested they put together a package to give the Board time to discuss these issues.

Mr. Roche assumed that Board members had had an opportunity to look at the compact. The next question had to do with what kinds of incentives the Board had thought about. If the Board had not thought about this, they could schedule another meeting. Mrs. Gordon commented that this was MCCPTA's opportunity to discuss what they wanted to discuss. She knew that MCCPTA had put a tremendous amount of time into the compact, but the Board did not have the compact in front of them. She suggested that Mr. Roche list the questions for them because the Board had to know whether or not this was the focus of MCCPTA. She said MCCPTA would have to understand that the Board could not give six or seven answers to every question.

Mr. Roche suggested that at some point they come back together again on the following topics:

The feasibility of linking compensation with improvements in student academic achievement and other measures of educational quality; rewarding increases in productivity, where relevant. They were not necessarily talking about merit pay, but they were including school incentives such as those adopted by Cincinnati. They might go with more quantifiable things in the support services area. They were looking for some thought on how MCPS could move to those sorts of things at a time when revenue were limited and student growth was rapid. There was also a notion of what might be done to extend the site-based participatory management plan.

Information to the general public, particularly parents, who might be interested in analyzing the cost/benefits of budgets and expenditures particularly at the local level. Cincinnati presented school-level information for both CIP and operating budgets. This would help carry a message to the public and the County Council.

Long-range planning. They believed this was the job of the Board and not the job of a volunteer citizen committee. If Boards did anything, they ought to be doing long-range planning. What did the Board plan to do about long-range planning?

Cost-savings. The Board was caught in a public relations bind. They had a group tell them they could save a whole lot of costs if they created a lot of efficiencies, but the group was not specific about cost savings and how much it would cost to save those costs. How far had the Board gone beyond the earlier discussion of cost savings and efficiencies? Where were they going? They were particularly interested in transportation. It cost \$19.50 a day to transport one special education child, and they wondered what could be done about that.

Priorities. What thinking had the Board done about how to set priorities on various program elements? Where was the Board going with long-term priority setting?

Mrs. Fanconi thanked Mr. Roche for restating the compact and suggested that the Board respond at another time.

Mr. Ewing commented that there were no new issues on the list, and there was no lack of sensitivity on the part of the Board to coming to grips with these issues. The hardest thing to do was to plan long-range because they were a public body subject to the annual decision-making process of another organization responsible for funding. Over the years the Board had adopted a number of long-range plans which went by the wayside when the Board did not receive funding. He did not sense a recognition by the MCCPTA budget committee that the Board faced a structure for decision-making that was resistant to the various things they all wanted to do. There were limits to what the Board could do. This meant they should pursue their objectives with the recognition that there were severe limits on what they could accomplish. For example, there was hardly a long-range plan in the public sector that had been systematically implemented over two or three years.

Dr. Cheung remarked that MCCPTA had posed good management questions, but sometimes theories did not work. Corporate America was giving up on strategic planning because long-range planning was not flexible enough to respond to environmental changes. He, too, pointed out that the Board did not have the authority to generate revenue, and he did not know how they could plan if they had to depend on others for funding. However, it might help if they had a two-year budget planning cycle.

Dr. Cheung stated that he would like to have the public look at how well the Board was doing in terms of what a student should

know and what resources were needed to have students achieve. A public agency could not be truly efficient because of many factors. In the private sector, companies made money and managed their resources. In the public sector, they were distributing resources and requesting money rather than making it.

Mrs. Gordon noted that they did not have a Board position on these issues. However, the Board had talked about site-based management, and they had heard from the Corporate Partnership that there did need to be more responsibility at the local level for decision-making. The Board did have a site-based policy. She agreed they did need to be more and more accountable to the public in tight fiscal times because they did have to have defensible budgets. She believed in long-range budget planning with the understanding that fiscal conditions changed. She did not see there were many of the things on the MCCPTA list that were in direct conflict with the Board's goals; however, they might be able to look more to the local level to make some of those fiscal and educational decisions. She would like to see the Board have some substantive discussions about some of the MCCPTA issues, and she expressed her appreciation to MCCPTA for raising these questions.

Mrs. King requested an update on the technology plan. Mrs. Fanconi replied that all PTA presidents should have received the superintendent's recommendations. There would be public hearings on March 23 and 24 on the superintendent's recommendations and a Board alternative giving priority to high schools in years two and three of the plan. Ms. Gutierrez urged PTA members to take a good look at the plan because it did an excellent job of implementing the Board's policy dealing with equity. She would appreciate feedback on the big picture rather than which schools were chosen to be the prototype schools.

Mrs. King suggested that they turn to the final topic which was "diversity in the schools." Ms. Mimi Hassanien asked how the Board addressed the needs of students who came from different cultures and different backgrounds, socially, economically, educationally, and religiously. Some schools addressed these needs through culture awareness programs and holiday celebrations. It was asked if the Board ensured that each school had a cultural awareness program through social studies or the language department or international weeks.

Mrs. Gordon reported that the Board did have a human relations policy, and there were options for each school in developing their plans for implementing the policy. They knew that some schools did an excellent job and other schools did not do as much. She thought that with the changes in the Human Relations Department and the focus on inclusion, outreach, and awareness, this would mean a redirection for their human relations efforts this year. However, the new Human Relations staff had just come

on board.

Ms. Gutierrez commented that some schools had incredible leadership from principals, and these schools created a wonderful climate for the whole year, not just a special week. In other schools, it was as if multiculturalism was not an issue. The question was what could the Board do to encourage and set a climate, and she thought that the Board had not done anything in that area that would be significant. They had had several discussions about coming up with a multicultural calendar for every classroom, but the Board had not accepted this. She believed there was a lot of room for them to move in a focused way to support a multicultural environment in the schools. The end result would be an infusion of multiculturalism in the curriculum, and while some efforts were being made, there was no plan or a dedicated approach. She was speaking from a personal perspective.

Mr. Ewing suggested that the superintendent provide MCCPTA a list of what was happening in staff training, curriculum development, human relations, and other areas. While this might not be a Board-endorsed plan, it was a substantial initial effort to begin to address these issues. He agreed that the major shortcoming was that they did not require this of every school. This was an instance of the case where local decision-making ran up against systemwide priorities and requirements. He said that addressing diversity in the schools was a major priority and should be in every school's management plan; however, the question was how they were going to get this done with the small management staff they now had.

Dr. Cheung thought that the Board, superintendent, and executive staff believed in diversity and multiculturalism, but even though they had a new structure for Human Relations they only had four staff members to serve 180 schools. In the schools that had done well there was strong leadership in the school as well as active community leaders. He believed that the PTA could help to improve awareness here.

Ms. Hassanien explained that she and her committee were asking the Board and the superintendent to encourage principals to include multiculturalism in the curriculum and to invite parents and community members to participate when a culture was studied.

In response to a question about homework, Dr. Vance stated that their homework policy was very clear. Each year a memo was sent to principals at the start of the school to remind them that homework was not to be assigned on major or minor religious holidays. He suggested that his office be called when situations arose about homework or field trips occurring on religious holidays so that the Human Relations Office could work with the school. Ms. Samira Hussein called attention to a booklet on holidays which was distributed that her child's school and which

did not mention her family's religious holidays.

Dr. Vance expressed his delight that this was one of MCCPTA's areas of concern. To him this was by far the most important issue they had discussed this evening. Their ability to incorporate this increasing sensitivity would help them making meaningful change. He suggested that staff be invited to a future delegate assembly to present and respond to questions on this issue. With MCCPTA's continuing involvement, they could systematically correct issues and problems that were of concern to parents, particularly those under-represented in curriculum initiatives.

Ms. Gutierrez suggested that the Board take up this issue on a future agenda or reconsider what they might be able to do at the policy and leadership level. Mrs. Gordon thanked MCCPTA for their efforts in the area of human relations because MCPS was now addressing some very difficult issues. She was glad that Ms. Hassanien and Ms. Hussein were providing their leadership. She emphasized that the Board was committed to having MCPS as open and welcoming as it could be. The Board had taken a number of steps, and while it was not a perfect system, the Board was willing to work with the PTA. She thanked MCCPTA for the steps they had taken. Mrs. Fanconi commented that all Board members could endorse Mrs. Gordon's remarks.

Re: ADJOURNMENT

The president adjourned the meeting at 9:40 p.m.

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PRESIDENT

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SECRETARY

PLV:mlw