

**CENTENNIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Warminster, Pennsylvania**

**MINUTES OF SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
HELD FEBRUARY 7, 2005**

CALL TO ORDER

A Special Meeting of the Centennial School Board was held on February 7, 2005, in the Administration Building. The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Lynch at 5:03 p.m. The following people registered their attendance:

Board Members:

Sina Baranski
Marie Brzezinski
Joseph Faust
Rose Gold
Betty Huf
Joan Jankowsky
Jane Schrader Lynch
Cynthia Mueller

Administration:

David Blatt

[Mr. Grossi was absent due to a medical appointment.]

CEA/Teachers:

None

Public:

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mrs. Lynch led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

BOARD DISCUSSION AND COMMENT

Mrs. Lynch stated that the reason for this Special Meeting was to discuss security. She indicated that she had received a tremendous amount of e-mails from Board members and people in the community. She felt that she all names should be left out of this discussion, which should center around whether there was a need for security at School Board meetings and committee meetings.

Mrs. Lynch explained that the reason for not placing this matter on the agenda for the regular Board Meeting scheduled for February 8th was because if the Board decided that security was necessary at the meeting the next evening, the expenditure would have to be passed ahead of time.

Mrs. Jankowsky requested to make a statement; however, Mrs. Lynch felt that Mr. Blatt should speak regarding security first.

Mr. Blatt stated that he felt the most cost-effective way to provide security was to use in-house personnel who currently work at the high school. That rate would be time and a half their normal rate, or \$22.75 per hour. This was far less than having a uniformed or plain-clothes police officer or a private security guard.

At this point, Mrs. Jankowsky requested that her statement be inserted into the minutes verbatim, as follows:

“As an elected official from the Township of Upper Southampton and on behalf of the Centennial community, I am compelled to comment on the developments of the past two weeks that bring us together today for this special meeting of the Centennial School Board.

“Never before in my 18 years of Board service have I witnessed the brutal attack on free speech of elected officials through the guise of security concerns such as presented to us today by the Board president.

“In my opinion, the calling of and purpose for this meeting are blatant examples of the raw abuse of power by the board president in a vain attempt to silence ideas and opinions that are not to her liking.

“Moreover, I would suggest that the calling of this Special Meeting is simply an orchestrated cover-up for the rash and unilateral decision made by the Board President, following the January 25 meeting, to direct Administration to provide security at all subsequent meetings.

“In the January 27, 2005 memo to Board members, it stated **without ambiguity** that the decision to have security at Board and committee meetings was made by Mrs. Lynch alone. According to the School Code, individual members of the Board have no legal authority to expend District funds independently and outside of the meetings of the Board.

“When challenged on this issue by both Mrs. Mueller and myself, the Board President, without consulting all Board members, set the date and time for this meeting and cleverly called it ...”an urgent, special” meeting ... “to discuss all viewpoints on the subject of security.”

“Repeated requests to Mrs. Lynch to provide an explanation for the need to have security at our meetings have gone unanswered.

“Over the past thirteen months, the Southampton members of the Board and even a member of the community have been subjected to many **outlandish...bitter...and...emotional** comments from **some** of our Board colleagues at

meetings. Yet, prior to now, there has been no call by the Board President for an emergency meeting to discuss either the “threat” to the safety of those of us who were impugned or the need for security at our meetings.

Mrs. Lynch felt that Mrs. Jankowsky had twisted and turned things to her advantage. She indicated that she tried not to get into public debates but she did not feel she had to listen to this. She felt that the remarks from both sides of the Board were outlandish. She stated that the reason for being there was to discuss security, that she was not there to bash Mrs. Jankowsky, Mr. Grossi or Mrs. Mueller, the three elected officials from Southampton. They were all there for a common goal, which was to run a School District. She felt that to play to the newspaper reporter to have her put this innuendo and trash in the paper was ridiculous. She indicated that from this point she would not answer any calls from a newspaper reporter who decides to put in the paper that she was a former county employee and an activist in a political party. She questioned what that had to do with security. She requested that the personal attacks stay out of this so the issue of security could be dealt with.

Mrs. Baranski stated that she felt Warminster and the Board President had been trashed and that it had been going on for too long. She felt it should stop. Board members were all there for the children and the taxpayers. She felt it was ridiculous and indicated that she was disappointed in the people who were doing this, and she was offended. She did not understand the accusations made at the previous meeting. She felt it was beginning to be clear that security was necessary.

Mrs. Huf stated that when she was alerted to the fact that Mrs. Lynch felt that she was being attacked and her safety was in question, she was concerned. She felt the last meeting got out of hand and that there were accusations made without documentation. She was not aware of a hit list. She was willing to listen to Mrs. Lynch’s concerns as to why she felt threatened and why other Board members might be threatened. She felt that the Board members needed to discuss whether there was a need for security, and she was willing to listen.

Mr. Faust voiced his concern over whether it would be fair to in-house personnel to bring them into a Board meeting, which is basically the controlling body of the organization. That would be placing them in the position of telling a Board member what they could or could not say. Mr. Faust indicated that he has done some research on the budget and found that there was a Board miscellaneous account, which was basically a contingency account, which had about \$1,700 in it. At \$22.77 per hour, that could provide about 74 hours of security. He asked if that was adequate for providing security for Board and committee meetings. He did not know how many hours would be necessary. This amount would have to cover up to July 1st. After that, there would need to be money in next year’s budget to carry this forward.

Mrs. Lynch felt that committee meetings seemed to be calmer since there were no microphones and the meetings were not publicly broadcast. She felt security might only be needed for the Board Meetings.

Mr. Faust pointed out that Mr. Blatt had indicated that handling this in-house was the cheapest way, but he questioned if it was the fairest way for our employees.

Mrs. Brzezinski stated that she was very surprised that Mr. Faust was so concerned about the money. She felt security was very important and that if she was spending hundreds of hours on Board service, she deserved the best security money could buy.

Mrs. Brzezinski requested that Mrs. Mueller stop making faces at other Board members and the press, and trying to make fools of other Board members. She felt that Mrs. Mueller was using the press illegally. She felt everyone should act like an adult.

Mrs. Lynch acknowledged that there were two people who had their hands raised to speak, but asked them to wait. She asked whether the Board wanted security or not.

Mrs. Jankowsky raised a point of order, indicating that Mrs. Mueller had had her hand up for a while, waiting while several other Board members were recognized. She felt that as a Board member, Mrs. Mueller had the right to be recognized.

Mrs. Lynch responded that she was trying to calm things down and change things. Mrs. Jankowsky pointed out that besides free speech being jeopardized, that Board members were not being told not to look at one another.

Mrs. Lynch stated that the meeting had generated to a mess and asked for a motion to adjourn.

A motion was made by Mrs. Baranski to adjourn the meeting. (There was no second.)

Mrs. Mueller questioned that Mrs. Lynch had called everyone out for a special meeting but would not allow them to talk. Mrs. Lynch stated that she was trying to keep the meeting down to the facts.

A man in the audience (who was recognized, but not identified) stated that this was the first time he had attended a Board meeting. He had seen the article in the paper, and was attending to help determine if he was going to continue living in the District. He expressed his confusion over the purpose of security. He felt that everyone should be able to act like grown-ups, but he didn't see it.

Mrs. Lynch stated that she would acknowledge the people who had their hands up. She asked if Board members, with the age group they were, with the exception of one young person, would be able to conduct a meeting without getting into personal attacks.

The audience member stated that he felt some code was being broken by not being permitted to name names. He pointed out that he was from Warminster, and that he could imagine how people from Southampton were getting a complex about coming to these meetings.

Mrs. Mueller pointed out that Mr. Grossi had requested that this meeting be delayed since, due to medical reasons, he could not attend. However, his request was unanswered and was not respected. She stated that Mrs. Jankowsky had captured many of her sentiments on this matter.

She added that she felt it was a truly sad day when elected officials could not exercise free speech.

Mrs. Mueller felt that it was her duty to bring to everyone's attention some things that had been going on. She felt that the community deserved better than what the leadership of the Board had been providing. She indicated that when she attended the School Board Academy with Mrs. Lynch and Mrs. Gold, she was told by Mrs. Lynch that this Board would not be Warminster Board members versus Southampton Board members. Unfortunately, Mrs. Mueller has seen an intolerance for any difference of opinion and felt that Mrs. Lynch had made it clear that she did not have an open mind for the opinions or fact of Board members from Southampton or members of the community who address the Board with different views than hers.

As far as Mrs. Brzezinski's comments about making faces, Mrs. Mueller stated that she would love for the Board meetings to be televised. She pointed out that the first Board meeting when she did not have to sit next to Mrs. Brzezinski was the first meeting at which she was not sworn at or cursed at, which many people had heard over the cable.

Mrs. Mueller stated that when she saw the memo indicating that there would be security at Board meetings, she was very concerned. She questioned how Mrs. Lynch could unilaterally decide to spend taxpayers' money for security. She also questioned the issue of threats, and if a serious situation existed, why all Board members were not notified of it. Mrs. Mueller indicated that she requested from Mrs. Lynch a copy of the School Code or District policy that states that the Board President has the legal authority to spend tax dollars without discussion and approval of the Board at a public meeting.

Mrs. Mueller pointed out that security at the high school was discontinued because of monetary issues and wondered how, all of a sudden, there was money for security at Board meetings. She felt it was needed much more at the high school. She also spoke about the need for traffic safety measures at the high school at drop-off and pick-up times.

Mrs. Mueller stated that she had attended Board meetings for two years before running to be a Board member to assure that she had a good working knowledge of how a Board ran a \$68 million business. She felt that in the past 13 months the sound business practices and procedures of the way the School District was run had been dismantled. She asked that paranoia not be allowed to take more dollars away from the students.

Mrs. Lynch asked how the Board had destroyed procedures. A discussion ensued on whether or not there were proposals by Board members the previous year to increase taxes. Mrs. Lynch asked where Mrs. Mueller felt the Board had torn down fiscal responsibility. Mrs. Mueller clarified that she said sound business practices and procedures. She stated that there was to be money put away in each budget year to curriculum renewal; however, that money was taken and none put back in. Buses and technology were also being cut, as well as many other items. She felt the revenue side of the budget was not being addressed. She felt that this was like the board of a corporation and that there should be more requirements for being a Board member other than just being of voting age and being registered to vote.

Mrs. Gold stated that she was asked to run for the Board since she was a retired teacher and she felt she had something to offer to the Board. She stated that when she was elected, there was a very big deficit – it didn't happen in just one year. The Board felt it was time to do something about it, so they made cuts. Before this, there were people on the Board who passed everything. She felt that other people on the Board were frustrated with this and were lashing out. She felt it was time for this to stop and that Board members remember why they were there. She stated that she would like to know why the papers know what is going on before some of the Board members.

In response to Mrs. Mueller's statement not addressing the need for more revenue, Mr. Faust stated that prior to last year's budget with no tax increase, there were several years where millage was added to the budget. As far as technology, they were told that there were several computers in classrooms that weren't being used, so it was decided to slow down the refresh and reallocate some of the existing computers. As far as the education initiative and capital funds, he felt they served their purpose. On some things there must be a philosophy decision made by the Board as to whether they are funded in advance or not. Either way accomplishes the same purpose.

Mrs. Mueller felt that the basic idea was whether to look long-term or short-term. She felt that with a budget of this size, the need was for long-range planning.

Mrs. Huf stated that she would like to get back to the issue of security.

Judy Foulke of 130 East Bristol Road, Warminster, stated that she was previously a reporter for the Daily Intelligencer and that she had 35 years of observing and recording the actions of the Centennial School District and Board of Supervisors. She noted that there were very often differences of opinions and arguments. That was the way it was because we are in a representative democracy. The idea of getting a security person alarmed her. She explained that she had lived in places where there was martial law, where there was a security person in every public place. People who disturbed things were dealt with very harshly. She felt this was the wrong way to go. She stated that in her years of experience, she had never seen a time when someone needed to be escorted out. She resented that taxpayer money would be used to do this.

Grace Loscalzo of 360 Holly Drive, Southampton, stated that she objected to taking funds from the schools to pay for personal security. She felt that if someone was intimidated by another person in the room, that was their own perception. Regarding the representation of Southampton, she did not feel that her voice was ever responded to when she appeared before the Board. In closing, she encouraged everyone to "play nice."

Mrs. Jankowsky stated that \$3 million was taken out of the fund balance last year to balance the budget for operating expenses, which was not always a wise thing to do. The Board was made aware that Mrs. Lynch had met with county officials and was told much in advance of the budget proceedings that the county was moving toward establishing a new assessment ratio, and a cap on the revenue that school districts could raise of 10%. Therefore, the total that can be raised this year would be 7 mills, about \$3.5 million, which would just about cover last year's deficit.

There are many issues that have not been addressed, including technology, curriculum, capital improvements, salary increases, benefit increases, etc. Mrs. Jankowsky indicated that since by law we can only raise taxes to cover \$3.5 million, she did not know where the rest of the money would come from.

Mrs. Jankowsky stressed that it was important to have computers that could run the appropriate software.

Mrs. Gold reminded everyone that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss security.

Mrs. Lynch asked for information on when and where she met with county officials. Mrs. Jankowsky responded that she would get that information but that she was told by a County Commissioner that Mrs. Lynch was told about the 10% that would occur. Mrs. Lynch stated that she knew the same way and same time as everyone else.

Mr. Faust stated that some of the computers might not run high school software, but they run kindergarten software. Mr. Faust stated that when they first heard about the 10% cap, it seemed like a fairly large number since they usually do not try to raise taxes that much in any one year.

Mrs. Brzezinski stated that she felt the Board was not here to talk about computers, but that we should stick to the original subject.

Mrs. Baranski stated that a hit list was not something to be accused of in this day and age. If a student said it, the police would be there and the student would be pulled out of school. She felt that in the business of education, regional prejudices should be overcome in order to provide the best possible quality of education for all students regardless of political and geographic subdivisions. No director should intimidate or feel intimidated at any meeting based upon regional feelings.

Mrs. Mueller asked how there would be money to provide security at meetings in light of the budget as it is and the deficit. She questioned why it would be done here when it is needed so much more at the high school.

Mrs. Huf asked the Board to get back to the issue of security. She asked Mrs. Lynch if she felt the need was there, if she felt unsafe. She asked if the Board could move on and become a productive Board again.

Mrs. Lynch stated that it was her dream that this Board move on. She was thrilled when she was appointed to the Board, and it was unbelievable to see where it was now. This was supposed to be all about the children. Board members are volunteers and have different ideas about how to do the job. She felt there was a large possibility of having some type of security on a temporary basis for the Board meetings but she left it up to the Board members to decide.

Mrs. Huf stated that she was hoping that they could try another meeting or two, that this could be put on a back burner and see if Mrs. Lynch still felt threatened.

Mrs. Brzezinski agreed with the statements of Mrs. Foulke. She asked the Board to try again to be subdued. She was sorry that Board members had attacked each other personally and indicated that she would restrain herself from supporting this issue for now.

Mrs. Baranski indicated that she was very upset. She did not know what would happen but did not think that having security present would take away anyone's rights. She felt things got worse at every meeting. She would support having security for a while to see if it calmed things down.

Mrs. Mueller stated that she would not be in favor of security for the pure fact that she was not sure what the purpose would be. She stated that our men and women were fighting in Iraq for freedom, and that we have freedom here. She pointed out that she had kept her voice calm. When Mr. Grossi made his comments at the last meeting, his voice was calm. She was not sure what security would accomplish. She felt that the money that would be found for this could easily be put somewhere else. She pointed out that there were some seats coming up for election and that if this wasn't someone's cup of tea anymore, maybe they shouldn't run again.

Mr. Faust felt that if a Board member felt extremely insecurity, he might be willing to do something. He pointed out that during his ten years on the Board there were some situations where security might have helped. In this particular case, unless a Board member had severe concerns, he felt security might have the effect of escalating the situation.

Mrs. Gold stated that she would not be in favor of security at this time.

Mrs. Jankowsky stated that it was a rare occasion when she and Mrs. Brzezinski agreed, but this was one of those times. She totally agreed with the comments made by Mrs. Foulke. She also agreed with Mr. Faust that security might escalate the issues. Although people might disagree on issues and get heated, that was no reason to have security at meetings. She felt that the process should have been for this to go through the Finance Committee. She felt the bottom line was that we are better off not having security and not spending taxpayer money for this.

Mrs. Huf stated that she still had concerns about the President's safety concerns. She would like to see if the Board could move ahead and become a positive Board again. She would like to support the President but at this point, because of the needs of the community and because she felt that the Board could work together, she would not be in support of security at this time. She felt that if it needed to be addressed again, she would do so.

Mrs. Lynch stated that this issue was never hers alone, it was for the Board. If the people as a democracy decide it is not needed, fine. It was her dream to see this Board go back together to forget the three districts, to be united, work together and do the best job for the children, to move the District forward. She asked the Board to begin at the next night's meeting to move forward with a new beginning.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mrs. Jankowsky and seconded by Mrs. Mueller to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 8-0. The meeting was adjourned at 6:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Vickie A. Detwiler
Board Secretary