

Equity Suit Updates From The Courtroom

DAY 10 - JANUARY 17, 1997

Dr. Helen Sobehart, Acting Superintendent of the Fox Chapel School District in Allegheny County described her background, which includes a number of years as a coordinator of special education in a series of poor school districts. She described Fox Chapel as economically diverse, one township Fox Chapel with a median household income of over \$120,000 and another with \$18,000.

72% of the youngsters go onto 4 year colleges

10% of Community have college degrees

There are 4400 students in the district, 90 AFDC, 500 on free and reduced lunch

\$1,586,000,000 market value of property up by over 500,000,000 since 190-91

Tax effort is above the median

There are six buildings; 4 elementary , 1 middle school, and a high school

Of the 72% who went to 4 year colleges, 18% went to competitive schools

Their SAT scores , with new norms are 1068

They are always in the 90% in national tests and sometimes above similar school bands

Their class sizes are 23-27 in k-3 and 25-30 4 ,5

They have computers in all the classes and labs in the buildings more labs in the high school

They have instituted a capital fund of \$400,000 for each school year for technology

All schools have libraries and librarians, with 1.5 librarians in the high school

They have 12 AP courses in almost all areas

The district has partnerships with universities and private companies

The district feels an obligations to other schools in the state and elsewhere to share their positive practices and programs and regularly (through contracted 3 days) sends teachers and administrators to other school districts to demonstrate. They also have many people visiting their school district on a regular basis to see and discuss their programs.

The have a full extra curricular program which they feel is a positive part of school activities, They have 13 sports and 50 clubs and other activities. 16% of their students are gifted and 11% are handicapped.

There is a great deal of community input, through the strategic planning process. They district continues to do extensive surveying of the community to see how they are doing. Each building has a community person working with the staff to give input. The staff is very much involved in the production of curricular changes. Their average salary is \$57,000. Their negotiations are generally positive, careful and trustworthy as well as tempered.

Dr. Sobehart pointed out from her experience in Mercer County that decisions about economic choices are difficult when resources are limited. She described a situation where a school district had to choose between a leaky roof and hiring a new teacher. She believes that such mandates as busing for non-public schools are not a part of the general education program and involve the use of resources. Certification alternatives should be accommodated. "It takes resources to do what we want to do." We would not impose the Fox Chapel model on other districts, however they must also have a choice.

Mr. Schmidt asked if the program in the Fox Chapel Schools were created to make students well rounded and able to go on to enter colleges across the nation?"Dr. Sobehart answered, YES.

Defense Attorney showed Dr. Sobehart a picture from the Strategic plan and asked if she would describe what was going on. She reviewed the picture and described a group of elementary students doing some editing in the high school's TV studio. She said that since this picture was taken, the district had purchased a portable TV studio that could be taken from building to building in the elementary schools.

Dr. Sobehart was asked if the private and parochial school parents paid taxes to the district. She answered that they did. Mr.

Macdonnell, attorney for the intervenor asked Dr. Sobehart about who made the decision about where the child should go to school , private or public. There was an objection to the question. However, the answer was allowed. The parents. The Intervenor's case ended.

The question of the Philadelphia PHRC case was once again discussed in the court. Judge Pellegrini said that he had reviewed the Supreme Court order and was under the impression that the order vacated the findings as well as the funds to Philadelphia from the state. Mr. Schmidt argued the theory of both collateral estoppel and judicial estoppel saying that what you say in one case is applicable to another. The point made in the PHRC case was that the State had agreed that it cost more money to educate poorer children. Judge Pellegrini agreed that at the least, it could be read into the record. He did not rule on the issue as to the admissibility of the statements. For next week

No Court session on Monday- Martin Luther King Day

Tuesday Through Friday the state will begin its case

The following is a list of witnesses, there is no certainty of the order

Other than the Expert Witness, all of the witnesses are employees of the Department of Education

Mr. John Bailey- Distance Education and Link to Learn

Mr. Richard Kohr- PSSA and TELLS testing

Ms. Barbara Nelson- School Finance

Mr. Steve Simchock- School Profiles

Dr. William Fairley- Expert Witness (Analysis and Inference Company)

Dr. Eugene Hickok- Secretary of Education

The state has indicated that its witnesses will take 4 days.