

# Equity Suit Updates From The Courtroom

DAY 5 - JANUARY 10, 1997

This day was foreshortened by design. Judge Pellegrini asked that all testimony be over by 2:00 p.m. Therefore there were only two witnesses for the day.

Dr. David Magill, Superintendent of the Lower Merion School District in Montgomery County . He had been Superintendent of the Wyomissing School District in Berks County and Assistant Superintendent in the Wallingford Swarthmore School District. He began his career as a teacher in the Philadelphia School District. He was asked if he would describe his district as affluent. He felt that he could not determine what affluent was. In referring to the census data(1990) in the strategic plan of the Lower Merion School District, the following statistics were gleaned:

31.7% of all households in 1990 had incomes in excess of \$100,000

There were 6000 students in the district at this time

The district is growing- 700 additional students in the last 6 or 7 years

86.5 percent of workforce is white collar, 5.6% blue collar 7.7% other

There are 124 AFDC (poverty youngsters in the district) 5.6% free and reduced lunch

58% of the people in the district had at least bachelor's degrees (Dr. Magill thought it was higher in 1997)

Tax effort is one of the lowest in the state

assessed values of property have actually gone down

About \$5 billion dollars in market value

1 mil of taxes = \$320,000

Assessment is at about 6.4%

210 student sin the school need remediation

Very few teen pregnancies, some drug problems,

900 gifted students, 600 handicapped

40% of all school age kids go to private schools

Not a governing member of the Vocational School

There are 2 high schools 3 middle schools and 5 elementary schools ( soon to be 6)

There are libraries and librarians in each of the middle schools and high school

Librarians all have assistants or clerks

There are 8 psychologists, a counselor at each elementary school, 6 at the middle schools and 9 at the high schools ( 1/190 students)

Class size in the early years are 21-1

78% of all professional staff have advanced degrees

staff has 75-90 of prep time each day

There is reimbursement for courses taken and an incentive program for evaluation and individual staff initiative

Strategic plan was facilitated by a management consulting firm

Advanced placement courses in science, literature, math, language

5 years of French, Spanish, German, Latin, Japanese 10th grade), begin foreign language in second grade

There is a coordinator of technology

\$15,000,000 bond issue to renovate old elementary school

\$75,000,000 bond issue to renovate other buildings

All buildings will be brought up to technology level for 21st century

50 students taking English as a second language

These questions were answered from the strategic plan and from Dr. Magill's memory. He indicated that there are "High Expectations

for all Students." "Having and excellent school district keeps the property values high" The demands for excellence from the community and the parents are very great. All of the curricular improvements are expected to get students ready for the 21st century.

There were many questions and answers about the relationship of the kind of community it is to the quality of the educational product.

Dr. Magill said that the Pennsylvania Assessment Test does not appear rigorous enough for Lower Merion's students. The

Metropolitan Achievement Test is being done away with for the same reason. They each do not "adequately measure the children's achievement" They will be going to a much more challenging test for their students.

There is a great deal of community input in Lower Merion. According to Dr. Magill it is a very positive aspect of how programs are changed and how one deals with the curriculum Special education is closely monitored by the parents. Dr. Magill believes that it is his duty to make sure that the educational program is the best it can possibly be to serve the needs of the students. He does not believe that money is the second priority and that the needs of the children and the educational program for them come first. He believes that he is not "Allowed to be constrained by money-legally."

Mr. Macdonnell, attorney for the intervenor group questioned Dr. Magill about the community and the kinds of pressures that are put on by parents. He was particularly asking about special education parents and wanted to know whether programs were tailored to suit the parents requirements. Dr. Magill said that the program is tailored to suit the needs of the student. He asked if other districts faced the same pressures. He answered that other suburban districts did , but he did not know about the rest of the state. The most competitive colleges in the nation are interested in the Lower Merion School District. Their average SAT score is 1043.

Ms. Forney for the defendants asked about the high parental expectations in the community. She wanted know if they were providing an appropriate or "ideal" educational program. Dr. Magill spoke of a child who might be given a laptop computer to use, but the parent

wanted an aide (educational assistant), but the laptop might be all the student got. Ms. Forney pointed out that all the buildings were old, although well maintained and the community was the instigator of all the desire for new things in the schools. Dr. Magill said that the staff were the primary motivators.

Mr. Schmidt for the plaintiffs asked if parental pressure, educational level, and expectations should be the measure of a district's program. "If parents in another part of the state have different expectations, should that be the ultimate determiner of a child's education?" The answer from Dr. Magill was NO.

Ms. Forney asked further questions of how many youngsters take the SATs and the scores thereon.

Sue Fury is a sixth grade teacher in the Southeast Delco (Delaware County) school district and a former board member of the Lower Merion School District. She has an 11th grader and a 5th grader. She understands the sharp disparity between where she works and where she lives. Where she works there is a resource problem, where she lives there isn't one. She has to purchase between \$500-1000 of materials on her own in her teaching capacity. Music has been done away with. Art has been cut. There is little professional development. All of this is not true of Lower Merion. Resources are a great problem in Southeast Delco. She is pleased that her own children are Lower Merion School District. There are also more personnel and more resources in her home district.

Mr. Joe Miller for the defense pointed out that there were large teacher salaries in the SouthEast Delco School District over the last 3 years. The Board of Directors made those choices. Ms. Fury pointed out that the Board did not want to make those choices. Mr. Miller also described Ms. Fury's salary. He indicated that the state gave more money per ADM in Southeast Delco than in Lower Merion. On redirect Mr. Schmidt asked if the teachers in Southeast Delco should earn less money than in Lower Merion. Ms Fury answered no. There was also some discussion of the increase in salaries due to the inclusion of the state's pension contribution to the state revenue

The witnesses for Monday are:

Senator Allyson Schwartz

Dr. Jack Van Newkirk, Superintendent York City Schools

Mr. Gerald Browell, Superintendent Connellsville Area School District (Fayette County)

Frank Haas, Esq., member of the Harrisburg School District