

THE TIMES

ONLY NEWSPAPER WITH COMPLETE SCOTCH PLAINS - FANWOOD NEWS

VOLUME 14, NO.

SCOTCH PLAINS - FANWOOD, N.J. THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1973

15 CENTS A COPY

Parents Views On School Lunch Policy

A "Standing Room Only" crowd was on hand last Thursday night to tell the Board of Education their views on elementary school lunch policy and teacher contracts. The auditorium at Terrill Junior High School was filled to capacity for the session, which lasted until midnight, despite the lure of the Riggs-King tennis match.



The monthly meeting of the Board of Education drew a full house - many of them angry parents protesting lunch policy, the rest teachers urging contract settlement.

Dozens of parents addressed the Board seeking a change in the highly controversial lunch policy adopted in August, which sets distance limits for children who may eat bag lunches in the classroom. The parents, who have since formed an organization, Concerned Elementary School Parents Group, seek a host of answers and changes in the new policy. Many were visibly angry and hostile to the Board because of their feelings on the school policy. Board President Joseph Parry repeatedly said there was no policy change because the Board had found no viable solution.

The policy states that children in grades 1 through 3 who live over a half mile and children in grades 4 through 6 who live over a mile and children who are bused to school may remain for lunch. All others must go home. The policy came about, according to Board president Joseph Parry, because the PTA Council asked the Board of Education to take some measures to improve the conditions in the elementary schools at lunch time. Last year, in many schools, over 80 percent of the students remained for lunch but there were not enough teacher aides to provide safe and adequate supervision. The hiring of enough aides to retain the same open policy as last year would have cost an additional \$60,000 in the budget. Therefore, Parry explained, the Board set the policy of restrictions. "There are ten things more to spend every \$60,000 on, and \$12.5 million spreads pretty thin," Parry said. He noted that the Board had to consider educational value for the money spent.

Many concerned parents are upset because they are working mothers. They have raised questions regarding insurance liability of neighbors or babysitters who might take their children

for them at lunch. However, there have been many other considerations raised by the organized group besides working mothers.

One mother has been lunching daily on the steps of School One with her two children. She has a child in afternoon kindergarten who must be at school at 12:45, whereas her older third grader doesn't get home for lunch until noon. She said she had requested a switch to morning kindergarten to no avail.

Mrs. Ann Wodjenski questioned safety aspects. "Are you equating the dangers to the child with a brown bag lunch on the playground with the dangers of a child crossing Hetfield without crossing guards, and going home to an empty house?" she asked. She asked the Board's nine members to meet with nine representatives of the Committee of Concerned Elementary School Parents to try to resolve the issue.

Mrs. Dee Krumm suggested a referendum on the question, but Parry pointed out that the Board had been elected as a decision-making body and such a move would be abrogating their responsibilities.

Several parents were concerned over the distances children have to walk claiming that close to a mile walk each way allows the child almost no time to eat lunch and return in time.

Last month, when the Board held a public hearing on the policy, the question of high school volunteers came up. Superintendent of Schools Fred Laberge said that issue is still under investigation. The students would have to be over 18, and the Board is seeking a legal opinion regarding liability insurance. Regarding parent volunteers to supervise at lunch, two mothers said they had volunteered last year but had never been called. However the PTA Council had indicated that volunteer programs in some schools had proven unworkable and ineffective.

Board Of Education Surveys Residents On Goals, Costs, Etc.

7840 Respond To Questions On Broad Range Of Subjects

A Community Questionnaire Survey, designed by the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education to elicit community opinion in 68 areas of education, has been tallied and survey results were released by the Board yesterday. The intent of the Board in submitting the survey to the community was to assist in "better serving students' needs and the objectives and goals of our citizens."

Of the 22,043 questionnaires sent out, 7,840 were completed, returned and tabulated. Survey questions concerned school financing, curriculum, communication, community interest and other educational areas. The three target groups involved were community, students and staff. From the community there were 5,300 respondents from a potential field of 17,862 questionnaires. A total of 2,377 students of the 3,697 in grades 7 through 12 responded, and 163 of the 484 staff who received copies filled them out.

Survey summaries have been sent to the Scotch Plains Public Library, the Fanwood Public Library, all school offices and to several area newspapers.

In almost all questions on the survey, respondents were offered a choice of nine possible rankings, ranging from No Opinion

through the scale up to Strongly Favor, or Very Good, or Definitely Yes, depending upon the area in question. Some indication of community awareness and interest emerges in many areas, where the balance swings strongly at one end of the scale or the other, while in other areas the community would appear to be quite evenly divided in their views.

For example, 4027 of 7,243 respondents think it's important for a school to have a good football team, while 2306 do not think it important, 782 do not care, and 133 have no opinion.

Should teachers have career tenure? A total of 3152 citizens, students or staff oppose or strongly oppose, 2293 favor, 663 don't care, 625 have no opinion.

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Council Responds To Citizen Petition, Adopts Flood Control Measures

The Township Council of Scotch Plains and the newly appointed Township Administrator held an informal meeting with representatives of the Concerned Citizens Committee and the press last Monday night at Scotch Hills Country Club to outline future flood measures. The meeting was held in order to respond to a petition signed by over 500 citizens and submitted to the Council in September seeking future preventive measures in the event of flood threats. The Concerned Citizens Committee was formed after the floods of August, and has flood matters as its direction.

A statement read by Mayor William Kitsz pointed out the study underway for enhancement of municipal activities in times of natural disaster.

In response to the citizens' petition, Kitsz said "In retrospect there may be sufficient credence for the Township government to provide emergency relief services such as housing, food and medical attention to individuals in flood or disaster affected areas," until relief agencies can begin to function. Funds would be budgeted for emergency food supplies, and school cafeteria facilities may be possible in disasters. The township would provide on site me-

dical evaluation and treatment if necessary and would request emergency teams from Muhlenberg Hospital. A Red Cross service office would hopefully be established here, Kitsz noted.

Temporary shelter facilities mentioned in the report would include as possibilities Scotch Hills, Green Forest Park, Rescue Squad building, Southside Fire House and Board of Education buildings.

The Council has taken specific steps aimed at enhancing the response capabilities for a realistic Civil Defense Program and will develop a Civil Defense Council.

Regarding the citizen request for quick emergency pumping and cleanup, the Council will consider whether open bidding each year for emergency debris cleanup service may provide quicker cleanup.

Cooperative arrangements with neighboring communities

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Have you mailed
your contribution
to the
Scotch Plains
Community Fund?