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20 CENTS

## Howlett seeks Board/ Council harmony

The scene was straight out of Knights of the Round Table, as nine Board of Education members, twelve Council members from Scotch Plains and Fanwood and school district administrators gathered around in a huge circle on Tuesday, to discuss the 1979-80 school budget and other matters of mutual concern. The session was called by Dr. Robert Howlett, Superintendent of Schools. "In the past, certain differences have not always been handled in a way which has been in the best interests of the citizens," Howlett said, as he stressed the need for harmonious relations and a "significant step toward working together" between the two governing bodies and the Board of Educa-

advance view of the process of building a 1979-80 school budget for presentation to voters next April.

A maintenance budget would provide next year's students with identical programs and educational opportunities offered currently, Howlett said. He initially prepared such a budget for presentation to the Board of Education, after seeking extensive information from school principals and administrators. He considered suggesting such a maintenance budget, a budget with some improvements, which he feels the district and the students deserve, and a reduced budget which would require eliminations of funding in some areas.

The budget now in formulation already reflects changes for next year, including a proposed enrollment drop of 366 students, changes in utility costs, etc.

The final proposal to voters might reflect a different figure, Howlett noted. The Board will be involved in the final decision making process, and public input sessions would be scheduled for citizen opinion. The \$200,000 cut which would bring the budget in at a figure below "maintenance" would impact on personnel and program, he indicated.

Dr. Robert Rader, Assistant Superintendent for Business, outlined some of the fiscal concerns affecting the budget-building process. Lack of surplus going into next year will have a drastic effect, he said. There will be zero surplus applicable to 1979-80, whereas \$436,000 was applied to the current year's budget. This lack would have to be made up through property taxes. A reduction of approximately \$80,000 in state aid is anticipated, offset by anticipated state funding for resource rooms. Other revenue situations in-

clude a shortfall this year in anticipated tuition for out-of-district students schooled here. The district is realizing \$25,000 this year, rather than the \$45,000 anticipated, and estimates the same revenue for next year.

The Board budget preparation is frustrated by lack of resolution of a budget cut in the current year's budget, Rader said. The Councils cut \$572,616 from the 1978-79 budget, the Board appealed the cut in Trenton, and the issue is still unresolved.

In light of the number of financial problems involved, the administration and Board plan to seek a waiver on the cap limitation allowable for a budget increase for next year. State-mandated "caps" on the local school budget, if met, would be insufficient to meet goals, objectives and standards established by the Public School Education Act of 1975, officials said. Therefore, they will request that the local budget be set at \$933,361 above the permissible cap.

Edward Spack, Board Vice President,

Continued On Page 16



Photo by Mark Douches

A new understanding and spirit of harmony was the goal of School Superintendent Dr. Robert Howlett, who invited Council members to join with the Board of Education this week. Above, left to right, Mayor Ted Trumpp of Fanwood, Howlett, Board of Education President Leonia Reilly and Scotch Plains Mayor Alan Augustine.

tion. Once a harmonious relationship is established, the Board and the Councils will be better able to approach mutual areas of concern, whether minor or of crisis proportions.

Howlett and other school officials then proceeded to give the Council members an

He opted for a recommendation which would represent a \$200,000 reduction from a "maintenance budget." Howlett did not identify where the \$200,000 cut would be realized, but indicated that there would have to be some staff reduction over and above that required to reflect declining enrollments.

## Residents want programs for schooling of the gifted

The Board of Education sought citizen input on local schools at a public input session last week, and received indication of strong citizen desires for educational programs geared to the gifted child. In contrast to similar public input sessions in recent years, the comment from approximately 20 citizens was not critical of existing educational offerings, but strongly supportive of the introduction of new programs for those identified as gifted.

"A sizeable group of parents feel that the educationally gifted are being poorly educated," one parent told the Board members. "A growing number are beginning to speak out, and feel we are long overdue in addressing the needs of the gifted," another said. "There is a lot of talk about programs for gifted, but nothing is done," said yet a third parent. In total, at least 10

parents registered concern over this area of education.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Robert Howlett acknowledged the desire of the district to address the problem. The central administration had planned a formal approach to meet needs of the gifted during the current school year, but is unable to implement the necessary teacher training because of the unresolved budget cut, he said.

The meeting was called to provide the Board of Education with indications of citizen desires before it undertakes final preparation of the 1979-80 school budget. In addition to the education of the gifted, citizens expressed requests for relief of overcrowded classes at School One, correction of leaking roof at Park Junior High which causes puddles on the gym floor, junior high class sizes in Level 1 courses, and an inventory of materials and personnel for better distribution of same.

The Board must submit a tentative 1979-80 budget to the county superintendent by January 15. Final adoption of a proposed budget is set for March 22, and the public vote on the new budget is scheduled for April 3.

Dr. Robert Rader, Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Business, outlined the potential for the 1979-80 school budget. One

Continued On Page 12

## Local leaders comment on state welfare reform bill

Should able-bodied welfare recipients be assigned to jobs within their municipalities? If such a program were to become law, how would it affect the welfare rolls in Scotch Plains and Fanwood? These questions were posed to civic leaders in the local area, seeking their reaction to a bill proposed in the New Jersey Senate by State Senate President Joseph P. Merlino.

Merlino's bill would allow local welfare directors to assign work to able-bodied welfare recipients. It was endorsed by a unanimous vote of the Board of Directors of the New Jersey Conference of Mayors.

State Assemblyman Donald DiFrancesco of Scotch Plains is an advocate of this type of legislation. DiFrancesco, who plans to run for Senator McDonough's Senate seat, said he has favored such welfare reform since he first went to Trenton. He pointed out the experience of the state of Connecticut, which enacted a bill providing that state citizens 45 years of age or younger with no dependents and no disabilities are ineligible for welfare. Connecticut has saved millions that way, DiFrancesco said. He was not yet totally

familiar with the intricacies of the Merlino proposal, but said that generally, this type of welfare reform was something he and his party had espoused for some time.

Mayor Alan Augustine of Scotch Plains feels it's a good idea, which deserves thorough consideration. However, Augustine noted that the impact on the Scotch Plains welfare budget would probably be relatively minor, since the community does not have many welfare recipients and those that are receiving welfare are, in most cases, disabled. Mayor Trumpp ventured the same opinion regarding Fanwood's very minimal welfare roster.

"The concept is potentially worthwhile," Augustine said. "There's a two-fold advantage - one is the cost-benefit situation, the other is the fact that working would give the recipient self respect."

Don DiNizio is director of welfare for Scotch Plains. While he generally favors work for able-bodied welfare recipients, he was hesitant regarding the Merlino bill, in

Continued On Page 17

INDEX	
CLASSIFIED.....	19
EDITORIAL.....	4
LEGALS.....	19
SOCIAL TIMES.....	8
RELIGIOUS SERVICES.....	14

## SPFHS offers drama festival



Photo by Mark Douches

Katrin Leidal and George Falkowski rehearse their roles as Masters of Ceremony for the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Drama Festival, scheduled for this weekend. The festival, to be held in the school auditorium, begins at 7:30 p.m. on Friday and Saturday night. The program will combine serious talent and a "gong show" section. Tickets, at \$1 are available at the door.