

# Random Notes

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## *Omobien: Administration at “Skeletal” Levels*

After announcing the elimination of 92 AEA bargaining unit positions and several more from other employee groups, Akron board of education members engaged in what has become over the years an obligatory “I really hate to make these cuts, but...” therapy session. As each member took his/her turn, one’s comments will stay with us for a long time. In defending the complete absence of cuts among administrators, Linda Omobien described the group as being at “skeletal levels,” down to 160 and smaller, by comparison, than most urban districts. Under the circumstances, we’re certain not too many school employees (maybe 160) give a hoot about how big or small the administration is compared to anything.

The board blew it. They can spin this one until the wheel falls off the jenny, but they blew it. After weeks of warning the Akron community of deep and painful cuts if Issue 1 failed, the board acted to take opportunities from kids and jobs from virtually every part of its workforce save one. For all except those who will be unemployed come June 8, the board’s message hurts almost as bad as the cuts: conditions are so bad for those farthest from the classroom that cutting at the classroom level was a more attractive alternative. So much for the “we’re all in this together” spirit growing out of two hard fought levy campaigns. “Most of us are in this together” would be more appropriate.

Make no mistake about it—we expected unpleasant cuts and anticipated lay-offs. But we also expected the entire district to share the burden of two consecutive levy failures. Board members are not familiar enough (and we don’t expect them to be) with the every day operations of the district to determine on their own what goes and what stays. They rely on the superintendent for such recommendations. In turn, the superintendent convenes and leads a budget committee of his senior staff to decide what to recommend to

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**the board. Clearly the budget committee made no recommendations for administrative cuts. Whether their choice was the result of the tendency to want to protect one's own turf or they truly believed that the district couldn't survive a single administrative cut is irrelevant. What really alarms us is their complete failure to recognize and understand the political fallout—both internally and in the Akron community—of their decision to cut everywhere but at the top.**

**The board is answerable to the public much more so than staff. Ideally, the board should step in when staff stumbles. The Akron board did not; how long we will be saddled with the consequences of their failure remains to be seen.**

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**Among the cuts recommended by staff and approved Monday by the board are several supplemental contract positions.**

**The board can elect to not fill supplemental contracts when the activity for which they are issued is eliminated. For example, several sports activities were cut for next year. If there is no freshman basketball team, then there is no freshman basketball coach.**

**However, as they did a few years ago, the board approved the elimination of a few supplementals but did not cut the program for which they are issued. As we did back then, we'll challenge the legality of the board's attack on our contract.**

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**In lamenting the plight of the administrative staff, Mrs. Omobien may have unwittingly made a point that contradicts hers. Fewer teachers will be administering tests next year, which means the Testing, Evaluation and Research Department will have fewer test-givers to monitor, which means they should have time to study whether there is a correlation in urban districts between higher test scores (as there are in Akron) and fewer administrators (as Mrs. Omobien points out).**

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**During a recent senior staff meeting we were accused of publishing in the last *Random Notes* that there would be a retirement incentive in Akron. We sought the assistance of a couple North Hill third graders who, after reviewing the *Notes*, confirm our stance that no such claim was made. The exact language: "The board will choose among three options: offer an incentive this year, offer next year, or don't offer at all." We're hoping that whoever could not understand this mostly monosyllabic sentence isn't a member of the budget committee.**

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**A limited number of tickets remain for the Indians game on June 2. If you are interested in attending, we must have your order by noon Friday. If you can't make it here between now and then, please give us a call.**