

Prepared Notes for Board Meeting

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Tonight, we are assembled to pay tribute to our outgoing Superintendent and what a fitting tribute it is that the occasion is marked with laughter and jokes amongst the sadness of losing such a valued colleague.

I first met Dr. Conrath, and I'm sure she doesn't remember this, at the OSBA capital conference in 2005. I had that "lost puppy" look that new school board members get at the capital conference and Melissa and Jack had that "rock star" aura that had old friends greeting them every few seconds during our first conversation.

Her introduction to our district came at a bad time with an operating levy and a permanent improvement levy being recommended at her second board meeting. It probably wasn't the best strategy to run a levy with a brand new superintendent but Melissa soldiered on. After the levy failed, I had assumed our district would do what everyone else does which is to rerun the levy until success. Dr. Conrath displayed exceptional leadership when she decided that rather than do that, she would recommend a bond levy that would correct years of neglect with facilities, buses and technology. Our district is a different place thanks to the success of that effort.

Those first few months revealed something else about Dr. Conrath. She was *everywhere*. Every play I went to, every football game, every PTA meeting, Dr. Conrath was there. It was hard to believe there was only one of her. Her whirlwind introduction to Worthington was phenomenal and it was exhausting just watching her.

In the meantime, Dr. Conrath was learning to relate to each Board Member at their own level. One day, Dr. Conrath and I were having a discussion in her office when she casually mentioned that there was a cat living in the Superintendent's conference room. As everyone knows, I adore cats almost as much as Melissa does. Sure enough, there was a stray cat near the WEC and Melissa gave it a temporary home. I insisted on seeing the cat and Melissa cautioned me, in what turned out to be the understatement of 2006, that "The cat isn't very friendly" and best to stay away. It wouldn't be the last time that I didn't take Melissa's advice but fortunately, the resulting wound was superficial. That evening, in a Superintendent-Board Member bonding experience, we took the cat over to Medvet and Melissa later arranged for the cat's adoption.

In the middle of our first year, Dr. Conrath noted that I brought a can of Diet Cherry Coke to a board meeting and wanted to know if I brought enough for everyone. From that day on, I would bring Melissa a can of pop at each regularly scheduled board meeting. After a few years of this, I became aware that Melissa was using the pop as an indicator of my overall satisfaction of her job performance going into the board meeting. For

example, if I would bring her a Pepsi, she would conclude that I was dissatisfied with her performance over the last 2 weeks because everyone knows that Coke is better. One evening, I brought her a can of “Big K Diet Citrus Drop” and Melissa asked Julie, who was board President at the time, if I was mad at her for some reason. I’m still not sure if the Diet Coke indicator wasn’t just part of some Pavlovian experiment that Melissa was running, but if so, I was obviously trained well. Since Dr. Conrath will no longer be attending board meetings, I’ve become somewhat concerned that her intake of diet cherry coke will diminish, so I present to her this 12-pack with explicit instructions that she is to drink one can a day on the second and fourth Monday of each month. That should last her until the end of the year.

All kidding aside, Gary Tyack, Bob Horton, Jennifer Best, David Bressman and Carol Hasbrouck did this district proud when they selected Melissa Conrath back in 2005. The last 5 ½ years have been filled with every imaginable emotion but Melissa has led this district with a steady hand, a sense of humor, enormous grace and a genuine warmth that permeated every interaction. She leaves as her legacy a district that is in a better place academically, financially and culturally. It is my hope that as Dr. Conrath goes from employee to constituent, this board has not heard the last of her advice and that as a resident of this district, she feels free to drop by from time to time. If she does, I promise they’ll be a cold can of Diet Cherry Coke waiting for her and until then, Melissa, enjoy your retirement, enjoy Otterbein, enjoy California and thank you for 6 great years.