

BETHLEHEM AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

MARCH 25, 2008

A Special Meeting of the Board of School Directors of the Bethlehem Area School District was held on Tuesday, March 25, 2008, commencing at 6:08 p.m. in the Dining Room at the Education Center, 1516 Sycamore Street, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

REGULAR
MEETING

The Board Secretary called the roll:

MEMBERS
PRESENT

Members present: Directors Amato (via telephone), Cann, Dexter, Follweiler, Haytmanek, Koch, McKeon and Leeson – 7 members present with one member present by telephone.

Others present: Dr. Joseph A. Lewis, Superintendent of Schools; Donald F. Spry II, Solicitor; Stanley J. Majewski, Jr., Board Secretary; administrators, members of the press, and other interested citizens and staff members.

OTHERS
PRESENT

At this point of the meeting, the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

PLEDGE OF
ALLEGIANCE

President Leeson requested that the audience observe a moment of silent meditation.

SILENT
MEDITATION

President Leeson offered courtesy of the floor to visitors. Speakers are asked to come to the podium, stating their name and address. Public comment in the first session is limited to 30 minutes. Speakers are limited to three minutes each. The board requests that, when possible, all individuals supporting a like position on a topic select a speaker to present their views to avoid repetition. If that is not possible, all are welcome to speak. As per school board policy, generally, speakers are limited to taxpayers, residents, or employees of this school district. At the conclusion of the regular school board meeting, another block of time will be allocated for public comment. At that time, the same rules will apply. It is asked that speakers observe proper decorum, without personal attacks towards a specific individual or individuals. It is not the custom for the board to enter into a dialogue at these meetings about concerns. However, the board does listen with care to issues raised. Speakers will receive responses, in some form, by the administration.

COURTESY
OF THE
FLOOR TO
VISITORS

President Leeson announced that the board members would be voting on the board vacancy this evening and encouraged speakers to come forward to make comment.

1. Mr. George Maunz, 622 West Market Street, Bethlehem –
Mr. Maunz stated that two years ago, he retired from a teaching position in the district. He said that he had about 15 years of experience teaching at Liberty High School and worked in the ESL Department. Mr. Maunz pointed out that he really got to know Sis-Obed Torres Cordero as a result of him eagerly accepting invitations to come to his classroom on several occasions when they invited professionals from the community to speak to the students regarding the aspects of their career and the pathway needed in order to pursue his or her specific career. Sis-Obed Torres Cordero told the students about his own personal story as a youth growing up in New York City. He described the challenges he faced as his aspirations grew and the need to set specific goals with the hard work and endurance needed in order to attain those goals. He told his life story with clarity and honesty and more importantly Sis-Obed was able to weave the fabric of his life experiences into the lives of the students sitting before him. Mr. Maunz said that as he spoke, it became quite apparent to the students that he had their interests at heart. He spoke to the students from his heart and it gave them the opportunity to dream new dreams. He allowed them to be inspired by hope and to have new visions of what may lie ahead in their future. As a result of motivational speakers such as Sis-Obed, they had seen great numbers of their ESL students select careers which required post-secondary education with many of them going on to two-year and four-year college programs. Mr. Maunz said that he knew that his interest in youth was not limited to only one group and pointed out that he sees each individual for their own potential. He believed that Sis-Obed's dedication to all youth in the community and his success in his administrative position with the Counsel of Spanish Speaking Organizations of the Lehigh Valley made him the best candidate to fill the vacancy on the school board.

2. Ms. Maria Teresa Donate, 472 Greenwood Avenue, Bethlehem –
Ms. Donate stated that she sat in front of the board two years ago because she had an interest in becoming a school board member. The board majority decided that her colleague, Sandra Figueroa-Torres and herself were either not the right candidates or weren't qualified. Ms. Donate said that at this point, it really didn't matter and actually she wanted to thank them because they gave them the strength to come together as a community and become a united front. She noted that they awakened a sleeping giant and as a result, they picketed and took the district court. They were now back in the same spot, two years later. She said that she read an article this morning in the Morning Call. It stated that some members were opposed to electing Sis-Obed Torres Cordero. She found it interesting because some members who were opposed in the past, were now in favor and vice-versa. Ms. Donate explained that it troubled her that it may not have come out of conviction but rather out of the fact that the board had distinguished itself by fighting with each other, for getting on each others nerves and having the special ability of contradicting just because they want to contradict each other.

Ms. Donate stated that as taxpayers, they were tired of it. She said that they want to call them for action. Ms. Donate felt they were running out of time. She thought they needed to come to terms and deal with the agenda and issues for which they were elected and that being the well being of their children. They needed to become an integrated board. She had faith and still thought they would do the right thing and start to talk about the issues which affected their children. She pointed out that they had a unique opportunity to set the record straight and she still had faith that they could do so. She urged them to get back to the agenda which brought them to the position and asked them to not allow history to repeat itself by appointing Sis-Obed Torres Cordero for the school board vacancy.

3. Ms. Lorna Velazquez, 210 Tenth Avenue, Bethlehem –
Ms. Velazquez stated that she had two daughters who attended Calypso Elementary School and was present to express her opinion regarding who she believed would be the best candidate for the school board position. She said that Sis-Obed Torres Cordero would be able to do something that none of the other candidates could do because he would be able to represent the Latino community. Latinos represent a significant amount of the Bethlehem Area School District student population and it would be beneficial to have someone represent their concerns and needs. She commented that when she talked with community members and neighbors, she often heard remarks stating that parents were not understood. It could only be an advantage to have someone working with them to help bring the community together, to get parents more involved and become more accountable with their roles in their children's education.
4. Ms. Sonia Morales, 29 East Fourth Street, Bethlehem –
Ms. Morales stated she was the mother of four children, three of which were honor students. She expressed her support for Mr. Torres Cordero for the vacant school board position. She said that Hispanics made up 32 percent of the school district's population, yet they had very few Latino teachers, very few administrators and zero board members. She thought Mr. Torres Cordero appeared to be the logical choice. The decision should not take them long to make because it made sense to have a Hispanic on the board. She said that he had worked with them and they knew what he was about. He supported those in need and he spoke for those who could not speak for themselves. She asked them why they would not vote for the logical choice and to please do the right thing this evening.
5. Mr. Stephen Antalics, 737 Ridge Street, Bethlehem –
Mr. Antalics stated that he would support whatever candidate the board chose and based on what he heard, he thought they would make the right choice. He noted that he was at a city council meeting where two students came forth to plead with the city council to give some activity to children above grade school level because it would keep them off of the streets. He commented that he was very moved and impressed that they came out to express that they lost two of their friends to murder and two to drug abuse. Both students were from the Career Academy.

Mr. Antalics said that he had attended board meetings where Career Academy students said that if it weren't for the Academy they would be "wherever." The students said they were in trouble with their family and in school but the Career Academy saved them. They became good students and wanted to go to college. He thought it was very dramatic for the students to come out and speak. Considering the representation from the Latino community, he urged the board to support the Career Academy to the fullest extent because of what it had done for the students. Mr. Antalics pointed out that besides getting a good education, the students were learning character and concern for his fellow man. He didn't think they received that at Liberty or Freedom High School but rather from the Career Academy. To cut one penny from the program was almost criminal because if one student drops out and becomes incarcerated, it would cost the community \$75,000 per year for rehabilitation. He cited the school district's statement of "One child at a time." He asked what they were willing to save to allow one child to fail the system. He urged the Latino community to strongly support the Career Academy. He recommended that they attend the board meetings and to speak out if they heard anyone speaking against the Career Academy for the benefit of their own children.

President Leeson thanked the principal and teachers of the Career Academy for the excellent work, which they were doing for the students.

6. Nereida Villanueva, 2025 Livingston Street, Bethlehem –
Ms. Villanueva stated that she was present for the previous issue regarding the appointment of a school board member. She said she had a conversation today about cultural diversity and how organizations usually don't do anything about it until they get sued. As a taxpayer, she thought they had the opportunity to make the right choice today by diversifying their board and they should further diversify by adding an African American as well to fully integrate the board.
7. Javier Vega, 1825 Watkins Street, Bethlehem –
Mr. Vega stated that he had been following the situation in the newspapers. He said he had known Mr. Torres Cordero for ten years and spoke previously about him and stood by his convictions. He reviewed that he had helped him with his children, having one son serving in the Navy who was presently out to sea. He stated that his son wanted to convey his gratitude to Mr. Torres Cordero for the support he was given. His other son was a student at Northampton Community College studying criminal justice. He thought those present were responsible adults and parents and said they must be an example to the children. He said the students looked to the adults for support. Mr. Vega thought that they acted out because they didn't get their voices heard. He said that he spoke from his heart and would be relentless regarding the issue. He also emphasized that the students needed the help and he was willing to do what was necessary to assist Mr. Torres Cordero and anyone else on behalf of the children. He said he was the voice of many people who could not make it to the meeting tonight.

Mr. Vega thanked Mr. Torres Cordero and all of his supporters. He also thanked Director Amato for making time for them this evening.

8. Mrs. Vivian Robledo-Shorey, 1408 Broadway, Bethlehem – Principal of Career Academy – Mrs. Robledo-Shorey thanked Mr. Antalics for his kind words. She mentioned the city council meeting where her students spoke and noted the next day they received several telephone calls the following morning to find out why the students were at the meeting. She told her students that they weren't aware of their power. Their presence at the meeting brought concern about their needs to people.

Mrs. Robledo-Shorey stated that the actual reason why she was present was because the students decided to turn their second annual faculty/student basketball game into a fundraiser for the Echevarria/Vargas family. The students were self-motivated because two of the students were previously at the Career Academy and she noted they were like a family. When the tragedy happened, the students said it would be a great way to support the family. She announced that the students raised \$1,800 with the assistance of RASA (Regional Academic Standards Academy). They invited schools to participate, which were touched by the tragedy, because of their association with the family. She pointed out that the students beat the faculty and it was a great night. They heard today that Manny Garcia, who was injured in the fire, was improving and concluded that their prayers were with him.

President Leeson asked for a motion to accept the recommendation of the board, which was for the appointment of a new board member. Director Dexter made the motion, which was seconded by Director Follweiler.

RECOMMENDATION
OF THE BOARD –
MOTION TO APPOINT
NEW BOARD MEMBER

President Leeson explained that during the roll call vote, each board member would have the opportunity to name the individual, which they would like to recommend to fill the board vacancy. She asked if there was any discussion before the vote.

Director Amato thought they should take a few minutes to discuss how the appointment might impact the present lawsuit. He had the understanding that it had not been signed as of yet. He noted there were five great candidates but there seemed to be one, which stood out, at least in his mind. He noted that they had talked many times about the last appointment, where they had an opportunity for diversity on the board, but passed on it. Director Amato reiterated that he thought they should take a few minutes to discuss how the appointment might have far reaching effects on the pending lawsuit.

President Leeson replied that she would be happy to entertain any discussion on the subject but also asked the district's counsel to weigh in as to what they could and could not discuss at this point.

Attorney Spry addressed Director Amato and said he was not sure what he wanted to discuss. His understanding from Attorney Rhodes was that whatever the board decided to do would not affect the lawsuit.

Director Amato inquired with Attorney Spry about the fact that it had not been signed as of yet.

Attorney Spry replied that it was Attorney Rhodes opinion. He could not speak as to the validity or invalidity of the opinion but noted that Attorney Rhodes was the person closest to it.

Director Amato reiterated that it was a very important decision for the board to make with the pending lawsuit. He added that the agreement on the table could be pulled off if the school board appointment was not favorable to the lawsuit. He didn't think it should be taken lightly and thought that everybody needed to know that it could have some far reaching effects depending upon what they did as far as an appointment.

Attorney Spry asked Director Amato if his point was that if there was no signed and sealed settlement at the present time, then opinions could change. Director Amato replied, "Yes, very much so."

Director Koch added that her idea of the long range effects was a more concern for the Latino boys at their high schools whom they had discussed many times regarding their high drop-out rate. She said that since she has been a board member, she has tried to get another Latino school board member appointed. There was one time when she did not choose who the Latino community wanted her pick because she didn't think it was the right choice at that time. However, there had been many times where she had gone to the Latinos in the community to try to bring in the male leadership, which they needed. She emphasized that they were so lucky to have somebody who wanted to volunteer to be that role model for the male students who were dropping out. She said there were many Latino women in administrative positions but she felt they needed the male leadership.

Director Follweiler said that all of the candidates who applied for the position were all fabulous regardless of their final decision. She thought that a shining example was Director McKeon who had previously applied and was not selected in the last round, but he did run on the ballot and won. She told all of the candidates that it was possible to actually be selected by the community if they were not appointed today. She thought Director McKeon was the only individual from the group who ran on the ballot during the following election and she thanked him for doing so.

Director Koch said that considering the things that had been going on in the school district, which had been published in the press, she admired anybody who had the courage to come forward with a desire to be on the board.

Director Haytmanek stated that he was the only school board member who lived and worked on the Southside but he was not Hispanic. He noted that he had publicly stated on a number of occasions that he was very proud to live and work on the Southside and he felt that he could represent the Hispanic community as well as anyone. He added that what he saw tonight and what he saw in the campaign, he was not sure that his words were true. He said that he never grew up speaking the language of the land nor was he subjected to prejudice in the unfortunate way as some he Hispanic people. He didn't think that he could represent them as well as one of their own people.

Director Amato pointed out that they wanted input from the community and this was his third time being involved with an appointment regarding a board vacancy. He stated that the other two times, they did not see the type of input that they had seen with this particular appointment. He noted that he received approximately 50 emails in support of basically three candidates. It was fairly well split between Michael Faccinetto, Sis-Obed Torres Cordero and Benjamin Tenaglia III. They heard public support for Sis-Obed at the last meeting and again tonight, so he couldn't see how, as a board, they could set it aside with regard to the decision which would be made in a few minutes. He concluded that they asked for input and received it and hoped that they wouldn't blow it off because it would be a shame.

President Leeson agreed with Director Amato and said she appreciated the input from the entire community. She thought that the public, who had come forward at the meetings, had only been a small fraction of the input, which they received. She noted that she also received numerous emails, telephone calls and some personal contacts. She believed that most, if not all, of the board members had been receiving that throughout the past week. She appreciated the opportunity to receive all of the input in the past week. She added that the gentlemen who were running would blush if they heard all of the wonderful things, which were said about them over the past week. She said that it had been worthwhile to have the opportunity to receive the input.

President Leeson thanked all of the applicants, stating that each one of them bring talents to the district and she hoped that they would not leave the district, keeping their talents within the district, continuing to serve. She concluded that no matter who was chosen this evening, she thought that everyone on the board valued each one of them who took the time to come forward to apply for the position.

Attorney Spry asked to make one statement in order to ensure an accurate vote. He addressed Director Amato and stated that he had ruled that it was appropriate for him to participate by telephone, under the Sunshine Law. He wanted to clarify that he was given the opportunity to hear the public comments, board discussion and in fact participated in the discussion, even though he was not present.

Director Amato agreed to Attorney Spry's statement.

Attorney Spry addressed all of the board members and stated that any candidate appointed to fill the vacancy would need five affirmative votes with a publicly cast roll call vote. He clarified Director Amato’s question regarding the possible effect on the lawsuit, to the extent that there were settlement negotiations with no signed agreement, they could make their own conclusions as to whether or not whatever they do this evening would have any affect on the settlement. He said there was no formal settlement and noted the negotiations were in mediation.

President Leeson announced that a roll call vote would be taken with each board member selecting one candidate from the list. She noted that after the first vote, if no candidate had received five or more votes, the lowest vote getter or vote getters would be dropped and a second vote would be taken. The procedure would be repeated until one candidate received five or more votes.

ROLL CALL VOTE –
BOARD MEMBER
APPOINTMENT

The question was called with roll call as follows:

- Director Haytmanek – Sis Obed Torres Cordero
- Director Koch – Sis Obed Torres Cordero
- Director McKeon – Benjamin Tenaglia III
- Director Amato – Sis Obed Torres Cordero
- Director Cann – Benjamin Tenaglia III
- Director Dexter – Benjamin Tenaglia III
- Director Follweiler – Benjamin Tenaglia III
- President Leeson – Benjamin Tenaglia III

CANDIDATE	VOTE
1. Anant G. Sabnis	—
2. Michael E. Faccinetto	—
3. Michael Stauffer	—
4. Benjamin Tenaglia III	5
5. Sis-Obed Torres Cordero	3

Judge Narlesky administered the oath of office to Mr. Tenaglia.

President Leeson congratulated Mr. Tenaglia on his appointment to the school board.

Dr. Lewis presented the following recommendations of the administration.

RECOMMENDATION
OF THE
ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Lewis noted that Item 1 was pulled because they did not receive parental signatures.

President Leeson communicated that there were some changes within the committees with the addition of their new member, she will be discussing their structure. She noted that Director Follweiler had agreed to head the Human Resource Committee, Director Cann had agreed to head the Facilities Committee and Director McKeon had agreed to head the Finance Committee.

COMMITTEE
STRUCTURE

BETHLEHEM AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

MISSION STATEMENT

The Bethlehem Area School District, in partnership with the home and community, is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment in which each student will attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to become a productive citizen and lifelong learner in our technologically demanding and culturally diverse society.

AGENDA
SPECIAL MEETING – March 25, 2008

1. Roll Call
2. Pledge of Allegiance and Silent Meditation
3. Courtesy of the Floor to Visitors (30 minutes allowed)
4. Recommendation of the Board
5. Oath of Office for New Board Member by the Honorable Judge James Narlesky
6. Recommendation of the Administration
7. President's Communications/Unfinished Business
8. New and Miscellaneous Business
9. Courtesy of the Floor to Visitors
10. Adjournment

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1. Appointment of New Board Member

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1. *Appointment of New Board Member*

INFORMATION:

At the February 25, 2008, Regular Board Meeting, Joseph L. Craig announced his resignation from the Board of School Directors of the Bethlehem Area School District effective immediately due to personal and health reasons. The Board of School Directors accepted his resignation at the February 25, 2008, Regular Board Meeting.

On March 7, 2008, a Notice of the board vacancy was advertised indicating that the Board of School Directors is seeking applicants. Residents of the district who were interested in applying for the position of School Director were required to submit the appropriate paperwork by 12:00 p.m. on March 13, 2008, to the board secretary. The board secretary received five applications for the position of School Director.

On March 17, 2008, the Board of School Directors conducted interviews at East Hills Middle School to fill the vacancy. The following candidates were interviewed:

1. Anant G. Sabnis
2. Michael E. Faccinetto
3. Michael Stauffer
4. Benjamin Tenaglia III
5. Sis-Obed Torres Cordero

The candidate selected will serve until December 7, 2009.

A roll call vote will be taken with each board member selecting one candidate from the above list. If after the first vote, no candidate has received five or more votes, the lowest vote-getter(s) is/are dropped; a second vote is taken. This procedure is repeated until one candidate receives five or more votes.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of School Directors appoints Benjamin Tenaglia III as a board member to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Joseph L. Craig and serve the until December 7, 2009.

President Leeson announced that a roll call vote would be taken with each board member selecting one candidate from the list. She noted that after the first vote, if no candidate had received five or more votes, the lowest vote getter or vote getters would be dropped and a second vote would be taken.

ROLL CALL VOTE
BOARD MEMBER
APPOINTMENT

The procedure would be repeated until one candidate received five or more votes.

The question was called with roll call as follows:

Director Haytmanek – Sis Obed Torres Cordero

Director Koch – Sis Obed Torres Cordero

Director McKeon – Benjamin Tenaglia III

Director Amato – Sis Obed Torres Cordero

Director Cann – Benjamin Tenaglia III

Director Dexter – Benjamin Tenaglia III

Director Follweiler – Benjamin Tenaglia III

President Leeson – Benjamin Tenaglia III

CANDIDATE	VOTE
1. Anant G. Sabnis	—
2. Michael E. Faccinetto	—
3. Michael Stauffer	—
4. Benjamin Tenaglia III	5
5. Sis-Obed Torres Cordero	3

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1. *Special Education Settlement Agreement*

INFORMATION:

The parent of Student Number 0974753 of the Bethlehem Area School District, who is eligible for special education under the Individual Disabilities Education Act, along with the Bethlehem Area School District, met to discuss issues surrounding the Free and Appropriate Public Education of this student. Both parties met in the attempt to achieve an amicable resolution to the disputes in an effort to avoid complex time-consuming due process litigation and to move forward in the best interest of the student.

This information was discussed with the Board of School Directors in Executive Session on Monday, March 17, 2008, with the administration and counsel.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of School Directors approves the Settlement Agreement and Release of all disputes between the Bethlehem Area School District and the parent on behalf of Student Number 0974753, including any claims arising under any provision of federal or state law, relating to the student's educational program, that have or could have arisen between the family and the Bethlehem Area School District up to the date of this agreement. By accepting the terms of the agreement, the parent acknowledges and agrees that by accepting the terms of this agreement, the parent releases and forever discharges the School District and insurers from any claim or demand of any kind, administrative or judicial, concerning the education of the student as outlined in the agreement. The School District hereby acknowledges and agrees that it has been fully informed of its respective rights, fully understands those rights, and understands the terms of the entire agreement, consisting of 16 sections.

Dr. Lewis noted that Item 1 was pulled because they did not receive parental signatures.

The following individuals addressed the Board of School Directors:

COURTESY
OF THE
FLOOR TO
VISITORS

1. Mr. Michael Stauffer, 909 Cayuga Street, Bethlehem –
Mr. Stauffer stated that he wanted to speak about the Career Academy and said he was a neutral objective observer because he didn't have any children who attended the program. He noted that the two students that he knew who attended the academy were both respectful and great kids. He thought the program staff was doing a fantastic job and wanted to compliment the principal. He added that approximately one month ago, he took the time to call and email her to communicate his opinion. He said he didn't have a vested interest or agenda with regard to what would happen to the program, but as a taxpayer and parent who had met a couple of enrolled students, he was very impressed. Mr. Stauffer said that he was aware that budget hearings were being held and he did not know the status of the program but as a taxpayer and parent, he saw very good things and was in favor of keeping the school.
2. Mr. Stephen Antalics, 737 Ridge Street, Bethlehem – Mr. Antalics stated that he felt obliged to say that he was concerned with the Latino community because he had a sense of how they felt. His parents came from Europe at the turn of the century with many others coming to the Southside of Bethlehem. They were viewed as foreign invaders and were totally unwelcome. Mr. Antalics spoke of how the various ethnic groups were victims of discrimination, being relegated to a second class status in a very open manner. Their parents didn't trust the banks, putting their money in mattresses and they didn't vote. Eventually their people became integrated into society. He noted that his parents never accepted English as their language because they stayed within the Slovan/Windish community. He said he worked for Dana Grubb at the 4th and 5th Ward during the last election. He observed how people who passed by the church where the election was being held were choosing not to vote at all. He said he understood how they voted and commented that it was a mixed bag. He said that after 50 years he returned to the Southside and pointed out that he had the greatest view of the entire city. There is the Latino community and his community. Mr. Antalics said that when he went to church, comments were made to him about the Latino flags on West Broad Street and that they belonged on the Southside, revealing a projected attitude in the community to the new foreign invader. He suffered the same treatment as a child, noting that he felt uneasy when he crossed the Lehigh River, feeling as if he was in foreign territory. He spoke to a number of students from Broughal Middle School and said they expressed exactly how he felt when he was a student in the middle school and high school. He thought that there was a responsible way to take control of one's own destiny. They were never given a position or appointed to any public position, although they never asked for it. It was a very thorny issue and he was sympathetic because he had strong empathy for the Latino community because he suffered in the same way.

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Mr. Antalics said that if their vote was based upon the quality of the person, then he respected it. He felt there should be a person of Latino descent on the board and the community had the responsibility to support that person. When he was at the 4th and 5th Ward, he was dismally disappointed because the Latino candidate for the school board was very depressed.

President Leeson requested a motion for adjournment. Directors Dexter and McKeon moved to adjourn the meeting, which carried by voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 6:56 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Attest,

Stanley J. Majewski, Jr.
Board Secretary

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