

HYDE SCHOOL TURNOVER

Joe Gauld returns

Hyde School founder Joe Gauld is coming back to run the alternative private school in Bath. His return ends a prolonged effort by Gauld supporters on the board of directors to place him back in charge.

Gauld will fill the new position of chief executive officer that will be above the headmaster's job. Timothy Wilson is the acting headmaster. Although Wilson's contract does not run out until next June, he is not sure he will remain at Hyde. "It's up to me and Gauld to see if [staying until then] is possible," he said.

Wilson believes that Gauld was brought back because a majority of the board doubts whether "a Black man can bring money into a private school." He also told *Maine Times* that his efforts to increase the percentage of Maine students at Hyde with Indians figured in his unpopularity with the board.

Gauld's successful return is due partly to Hyde's financial difficulties. Gauld offered Hyde a solution to its pressing money problems in exchange for regaining control of the school. A majority of the board accepted. Gauld brings with him a firm commitment of \$500,000 from three individuals to apply to the school's growing debt which was \$604,000 as of last June. Gauld also has promised to raise another \$500,000 above normal fundraising proceeds.

Portland insurance executive Chris Smith, who was chairman of the board until September, said that the first half million dollars is "quite firm" because the contributors can easily afford it. The second half million is "less sure," he said, because Gauld has to raise it by going out to many Hyde alumni, parents of students and friends.

Acting headmaster Wilson said that Hyde's money problems began when Gauld left four years ago after a battle with Ed Legg, whom Gauld had groomed to succeed him. The fight was over Hyde's educational mission. Gauld believed that Hyde should be a national model for educational reform.

Legg's position was that Hyde should promote a national debate on educational reform which would lead to better schools. Legg won and Gauld went to Washington, D.C. to become an educational consultant. Still, his influence on the board continued.

"Some people always wanted him back," said Smith. "They would work behind the scenes, in some sense to the detriment" of Hyde. He said student enrollment suffered and there was always an educational philosophical battle going on. Legg left to follow his political interests and was replaced by William McLean III, who, Smith said, "mistakenly" took the job. McLean had come from a public school and didn't like "the private school environment, the 24-hour a day, seven days a week job," Smith said. McLean also ran into "the camp" that still wanted Gauld back, he said. When McLean resigned earlier this year, there was another student enrollment drop, adding to the increasing financial problems. At its peak, student enrollment was 200 and is down to 140 this year. Tuition is \$11,000 a year.

Wilson, formerly the state ombudsman and head of the Maine Division of Community Services, said, "I came in to help and pulled things together. There was an almost complete staff turnover, he said. "I did what I said I would do. The school is running well and [it] has not been a problem to the community." (In past years, Smith said, there was friction between Hyde and Bath residents, some of it because of Gauld's strong personality and some of it because of students' antics.)

Smith felt that with the hiring of Wilson, the board had "chosen to go a certain way." He thought with Wilson that Hyde would develop more of a Maine identity and that the school could attract more support from the state's business community. Smith supported Wilson's idea of reducing tuition for Maine students in order to increase their numbers at Hyde.

Wilson went to the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Indian reservations to recruit students. He said he wanted Hyde to have "a diverse community. Well, some people [on the board] got a little tight."

A number of Blacks from New York City also were recruited by Wilson. "They were not just Black, they were Granadians, Haitians and Puerto Ricans . . . a real mix. Jesus, some of the board

flipped out. They thought it gave the wrong message," Wilson said.

In general, Wilson said some board members felt that he didn't understand the philosophy of Hyde. "They don't trust me to run [the school]. The philosophy of this school — character development — is very important to alumni and the old-line parents. They believe that since I didn't go to school here and wasn't part of Joe Gauld or his group, I can't impart [their philosophy] to the kids."

Last fall, as Hyde's cash flow problems worsened, Gauld's supporters made their first ball-out offer to the board on the condition that Gauld be hired as chief executive officer. "We voted not to accept it," said Smith. "I thought we had rejected it but some wanted to keep it open." It created a "political situation" that Smith said he didn't want to be involved in. He resigned.

When the issue came to a head at a recent special meeting, former chairman Smith and two board members proposed that Hyde sell three off-campus buildings. Smith offered to buy the buildings for about \$300,000 and lease them back to the school for the price of his payments. But the majority of the board refused that offer. While it would have eased the current financial problem, they said it wouldn't relieve Hyde's long-term money problems.

Smith said he was "a little surprised" at Wilson's comments bringing racism into the change of leadership. "I think Hyde has always been an open community. I don't believe [the current change] was racially motivated." However, Smith supported Wilson's statement about the board being afraid of having a lot of Indians in the student body.

"With Indians, the board has felt some concern," Smith said. He said parents made it clear that they weren't spending "a lot of money to send their kid up here to be in with [minority groups]. There was a concern as to whether minority groups would affect the overall Hyde education. I think we have shown time and again that was not the case but some people have that concern [about] Indians, and Blacks."

The board scheduled a meeting December 14 to make final arrangements for Gauld to assume leadership of Hyde.

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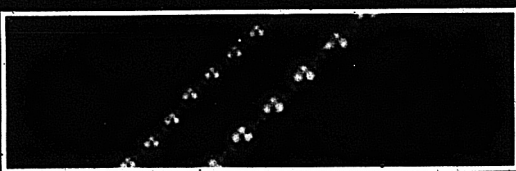
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