

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
JULY 12, 2011**

CALL TO ORDER

Council President McCarthy called the meeting to order at 9:00 p.m. He then said that this was a Council meeting and only Council Members would be allowed to ask questions. He then announced that there would be a public hearing at Mount Aery Church on July 13th.

Ms. Hudson called the roll. The following members were present

130 th District	Susan T. Brannelly	Martin McCarthy
131 st District	Denese Taylor-Moye	
132 nd District:	M. Evette Brantley	Robert S. Walsh
133 rd District:	Thomas McCarthy	Howard Austin, Sr.
134 th District:	Michelle A. Lyons	AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia
135 th District:	Richard Bonney	Warren Blunt
136 th District:	Angel dePara, Jr.	
137 th District:	Manuel Ayala	Lydia N. Martinez
138 th District:	Richard Paoletto, Jr.	Robert Curwen
139 th District:	Andre F. Baker, Jr.	

There were a total of 17 Council Members present.

Mayor Finch then addressed those present and said that he was passionate about public education. He then said that he knew Commissioner Coleman and that Commissioner Coleman said that education was the civil rights issues of this century. He then said that he admired Commissioner Coleman and was delighted to see Commissioner Coleman was Commissioner.

Commissioner Coleman said that he wanted to thank Bridgeport for the invitation to address the Council and looked forward to working with him.

On July 7th, the State Department of Education received a resolution from the Bridgeport Board of Education (BOE) by a vote of 5 in favor and 4 against, requesting the State Department of Education to appoint a new Board of Education. The resolution does not authorize the State of Connecticut to take over the schools. The responsibility for this district will rest with the newly appointed Board.

He then reviewed the details of the Connecticut statute and said that when the statute was passed, no one had expected a District to come to the State to voluntarily turn over control to the State.

The new Board will take the form of 5 individuals that will be appointed by him and that the Board will work on opening the schools on time. The statute allows the Board to function for three years. The State has no interest in assuming the responsibility for the Bridgeport schools one minute more than necessary.

Commissioner Coleman said that he believes that good results can come out this process and he was looking for individuals with a vision of high education. He said that he had no interest other than locating individuals who have courage to challenge the system and can transform the District into one that exceeds the criteria. This will provide the students the same opportunities that any other student in the State has.

He reminded everyone that summer school is underway and that there are contracts that must be honored. Mr. Coleman said that he was looking to make a high quality choice in these five people. He said that these five individuals need to be able to give attention to all of the Bridgeport students.

He said that he was available to answer questions about the objectives.

Council President McCarthy then thanked the Commissioner. He added that the Council was not part of the decision to turn the District over to the State.

Council President McCarthy said that he believed that the Board of Education is broke. He went on to say that he wished to make a statement that had two parts. He said that he hoped to use this opportunity as a reset button to fix as much as possible in the system. There are many obstacles to be overcome. Council President McCarthy said that the State Constitution guarantees an equal education to every student in the State of Connecticut. He pointed out that Bridgeport is a poor city and that it was impossible for the City to fund the education of their students. Council President McCarthy said that he hoped that this action would bring additional funding to Bridgeport.

Commissioner Coleman said that this action was not bringing new money to Bridgeport, but hopefully would bring people forward who were able to work on the issue of access to education. He said that he suspected that this would be a way to articulate the need for supporting education.

Council Member Walsh thanked Commissioner Coleman for coming to Bridgeport. After saying that he had reviewed Commissioner Coleman's qualification, Council Member Walsh said that he had nothing against a Board of Education made up of Bridgeport parents. He then went on to say that a Board that consistently votes 6 to 3 is not a board that is broken and does not need to be replaced. He said that he did not believe that what he has seen gives any credence to the State of Connecticut for taking over the Bridgeport School system.

Council Member Walsh said that the State of Connecticut has failed to provide equal education for the students of Bridgeport. Authorizing the Board members to move forward with the current resources was a joke.

Commissioner Coleman said that he was not interested in the history, but was interested in moving forward. He said that his obligation was all the students in the State.

Council Member Walsh said that the resolution included a clause stating that the City of Bridgeport BOE had not approved a budget for 2011-2012. He then said that if the Superintendent had encouraged the failure to adopt a budget, he would like to know why the Superintendent was still employed.

Council Member Brantley said that in reading his bio, she knew that he would do what was right for Bridgeport. She then listed some of the resources of the City for the students. She then asked what the process was for selecting Board members and if they would be restricted to Bridgeport residents. Commissioner Coleman said that he would like to have members on the Board from Bridgeport, but would not limit it to Bridgeport.

Council Member Brantley said that it was an unfortunate situation and appreciated Commissioner Coleman's focus on moving forward and accepting the task of doing what needs to be done for the students.

Council Member Martinez then thanked the Commissioner for coming and asked whether the State would work on setting money aside for Bridgeport like it does for Hartford. He said that he hoped that the new Board would choose every opportunity to bring about new potential for the City.

Council Member Martinez said that she would appreciate Commissioner Coleman's help in looking at the law because Bridgeport has no money. She then went on to ask what the role would be of the people who would be working on the Board. Commissioner Coleman said that the newly appointed Board members would develop their own resources.

Council Member Curwen then said that he had been the co-chair of the Board of Education for 13 years. He pointed out that Bridgeport was the largest city in the State and also the poorest. He then said that the present superintendent has been with the District for six years. He then listed the facts that he had not seen improvement in the test scores. He then asked Commissioner Coleman if this would be addressed.

Council Member Lyons then asked about the communication between the parents, the administrators, and the new Board. She then asked how the improvement of communications between the various groups would be measured. Commissioner Coleman said that this would not be his responsibility, but that of the newly appointed Board. It is their responsibility. He added that he was appreciative of Council Member Martinez's catalog of the priorities. The board will

not be excused from creating the opportunities or the responsibilities of any other District's board.

Council Member Martinez then asked for clarification on how the Board members would be selected. Commissioner Coleman said that he was inviting any citizen of Bridgeport to bring their name and qualifications to him. He will then evaluate the individual's skill sets and abilities to support the Bridgeport students. He said that the newspapers and other venues had published instructions on how to apply for the positions.

Council Member Blunt greeted Commissioner Coleman and asked what the benefits of this would be for Bridgeport. Commissioner Coleman said that his personal goal was to see that the five people who were selected for the Board would have the vision for moving Bridgeport forward. He said that he wanted to see people who were invested in knowledge and determined to do the work. He said that there are many good things that are happening in Bridgeport. He said that there was progress but he could not allow proficiency to be the standard.

Council Member Bonney asked how it would be decided when their work is done and who would decide this. He also asked if there would be new Board elections. Commissioner Coleman said that once the new Board is in place, the old Board is no longer in action. The statute allows for up to three years for action. If they are not be in action that long, would the City hold elections for the new Board. The State's assumption is that after a three year period, it will be evaluated to see if an intervention is necessary.

Council Member Bonney said that it appears that the new Board would have total control over the District. Commissioner Coleman said that this was so. Council Member Bonney then asked why the City pays a Superintendent if the Board runs the District. Commissioner Coleman said that it was necessary to have a superintendent to insure that the government mandates were completed.

Council Member McCarthy asked how this would affect the school building projects underway. Commissioner Coleman said that once the new Board was in place, business would go on as usual.

Council Member dePara said that it was refreshing to hear that Commissioner Coleman was looking for people who were strong and have the student's best interest at heart. He then said that he had a question about the statute that would require an audit. Commissioner Coleman said that this would be done early in the process. As the new Board comes in, they will arrange for the cost savings audit. Council Member dePara said that he hoped any cost savings would be put back into the schools for the students. Commissioner Coleman agreed. He then went on to talk about the new level of CMTs and CAPT tests.

Council Member dePara then asked about taking this a step further by analyzing the personnel to insure that the appropriate services are being delivered. With the technology, the world has

become extremely small. Bridgeport needs to equip their children to be doctors and lawyers and leaders. He then asked if Commissioner Coleman had heard about the Gibson report.

Council Member Austin said that he would like to jump forward and asked about the three year term. Commissioner Coleman clarified that the law permits a three year term. Council Member Austin said that a high school sophomore would be a senior when the term was up. He asked whether the graduation rate would improve. Commissioner Coleman said that he was bringing a new Board that would be accountable and could exercise the sanctions necessary to get Bridgeport back on track. He added that he would advise the Board to learn how to ask questions and take advantage of the type of training that will be available.

Council Member Austin then asked about the new Board overseeing the District and he said that there are 2 or 3 children sharing the same book, and the students can't take the books home. What would this new Board enable to the correct this type of situation. Commissioner Coleman said that the new Board would have to assess this situation for themselves. He added that they would use the courage he mentioned earlier to improve the situation.

Council Member Taylor Moye then said that the system has failed these children and she had serious concerns about the fact that a board of five people who could come in and change things around in three years. She then said that it bothered her to hear that there could be people on the Board who are not from Bridgeport. Parents want their children to be educated and not left behind. She pointed out that many of the children have been labeled. Commissioner Coleman said that the items that had worked in the past will be used, but it's important to realize that while all the problems are in Bridgeport, not all the answers may be in Bridgeport.

Council Member Taylor Moye asked if the former Board members would have the opportunity to apply for the new Board. Commissioner Coleman said that everyone could apply. He added that he was not interested in the history, but in moving forward. He wants to create new capacity with new opportunities to work with the Board.

Council Member Baker said that he had been on the Budget for two year and education for 4 years. He said that there had been many attempts to reach out to the BOE, but they had not responded. Council Member Baker said that he would like to see the new Board work with the Council and other groups.

Council Member Baker said that he had been shocked and also insulted at the meeting with the State Board. He had asked why the upcoming election for Board members was not being allowed to proceed. The answer he was given was that there was a lack of trust in the voters coming out to vote. However, this actually deprived the residents of their right to vote and was an insult.

Council Member Baker said that he understood that there should have been some training that was never done, but there were conversations between Board members and the State.

Commissioner Coleman said that in the end, while the points that Council Member Baker raised were very valid, the collective decision of the Board was to approve the resolution and present it to the State Board. He then went on to provide the details of the process.

Council Member Baker then said that at the meetings, he had heard some people offer recommendations and hoped that Commissioner Coleman would look outside the scope of the educators for resources. Council Member Baker said that there had been a proposal to close one of the schools. He wished to know whether this would be done. Commissioner Coleman said that until the new Board is seated, the current Board will proceed with business.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia said that she was a bit of old school and would like to see the teachers being able to teach the basics. She said that in 1995, there had been a group of Japanese students who had been very impressed with the schools in Bridgeport. It will be important not to put all the children in one classroom and let the children learn at their own pace. She then mentioned a group that was very committed to Bridgeport although not all of them were Bridgeport residents.

Council Member Walsh said that he couldn't help but notice how Commissioner Coleman spoke about the artificial boundaries for the Board members. He then went on to point out that the artificial formula for funding was limiting Bridgeport. Commissioner Coleman said that his focus was that he wanted his grandchildren and the grandchildren of all the residents of Connecticut to have a good education.

Council Member Brannelly said that she wanted to point out a few things such as the BOE tag line is "Expect Great Things", but that the residents should demand great things. She said that she was not comfortable with having non-Bridgeport residents on the Board.

Council Member Brannelly said that Dr. Ramos had repeatedly stated that he wanted every Bridgeport graduate to be college ready. However, not every child is going to college and that's okay. But every child needs to be life ready. The graduation rate is a personal failure. She then said that she looked forward to working with him.

Commissioner Coleman said that everything that was said was instructive to him and provided context from their concerns.

ADJOURNMENT

Council President McCarthy then adjourned the meeting at 10:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

City of Bridgeport
City Council
Special Meeting
July 12, 2011
Page 6