

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
EDUCATION and SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2013
6:30 PM**

ATTENDANCE: Co-chair Taylor-Moye; Co-chair McBride-Lee,
Council members: Torres, Halstead, Feliciano

NON-COMMITTEE: Council President McCarthy; Council member Martinez

REPRESENTATIVES: Ms. Maria Zambrano, Executive Director; Mr. Jorge Cabrera,
Community Organizer of Bridgeport Excel Program

Co-chair Taylor-Moye called the meeting to order at 6:40 pm.

She introduced the committee members and the representatives that were in attendance.

She stated that the representatives would take fifteen minutes to present the item to the committee.

She explained the procedure for conducting the meeting and she asked that the committee members address the Co-chairs to speak.

Informational Session with Ms. Maria Zambrano, Executive Director and Mr. Jorge Cabrera, Community Organizer of Bridgeport Excel Program re a brief update on the Bridgeport Excel Program

Ms. Zambrano explained that they were present to share information about the Excel Bridgeport Program –*she distributed packets to review the advocacy work*).

Ms. Zambrano offered some background information about herself, noting that she attended local schools, one of them being Bridgeport Magnet. She relayed how she struggled in college and that she wasn't academically ready to perform with her peers. She expressed that she realized that she was mediocre compared to her peers and subsequently decided to pursue her education to obtain a teacher degree. She further relayed some of the obstacles that she met throughout her school years. And she went on to say how she recognized that community involvement makes an impact on schools to make a difference. She added that she also had a degree in Policy and Management

and she's currently employed at Excel Bridgeport. She expressed that their motto is "*better schools for all kids*".

Mr. Cabrera offered some background information about himself and stated that he graduated from Bassick High School in 1994. He stated that when he went to college he struggled during his first year, because he had serious academic gaps. He subsequently received a lot of help and he managed to graduate. He mentioned that he gravitated towards working at Excel Bridgeport because he felt that the school system wasn't functioning as it should, noting that "*every child deserves an opportunity to receive a good education*". He went on to say that their purpose is to advocate for all students and they believe in a comprehensive approach.

He continued to say that they would love to partner with the Education and Social Services Committee as a platform for education.

Ms. Zambrano relayed the (3) focus points that have been implemented at Excel Bridgeport:

1. Issue advocacy
2. Knowledge building i.e., how to get facts out to the community, to show how schools are performing.
3. Community organizing i.e., engage youth, parents and community leaders through sponsoring events and forums and to mobilize issues.

Council member Halstead asked Mr. Cabrera to elaborate about his comment pertaining to Excel being a platform. Mr. Cabrera stated that their purpose is to bring up issues that need addressing as it pertains to the schools.

Council member Torres asked for details regarding the focus of Issue Advocacy. Ms. Zambrano explained that it involves the charter revision referendum to advocate on behalf of the Mayoral control part of the school board, noting that the SP24 reform bill is supported by the governor.

Council member Torres asked how this initiative would work with the committee. Ms. Zambrano said they were looking to have a relationship with the committee to build a base of supporters and to encourage better support for all schools. And to address issues on behalf of the constituents as needed.

Council member Torres asked where the data comes from. Ms. Zambrano replied that the data comes from the State Department of Education. She noted that the committee can go to **CMT reports.com** to review the data.

Co-chair McBride-Lee stated that the information outlined in the booklet that related to the area where students are failing, has been available a long time. She said she felt the point was missing as far as education, which is; what will they do about the failures in the school system. She questioned what is actually done with the reports and plans and if they are just on paper or are they utilized to try to find a resolution to the problem. She further mentioned that instead of having different programs implemented, everyone should come together to resolve the issues. She also mentioned Waltersville School in reference to the population, to point out how diverse the school is and where someone can become knowledgeable to find out the issues that might be plaguing any particular school. Overall, she said she felt that everyone should work together to achieve the best results.

Co-chair Taylor-Moye agreed that everyone should work together to bring as much they can to the table to achieve results. She relayed that a lot was going on in the city, such as the election of the new council members and other matters. She clarified that the point of this meeting was to start bringing people to the table to present their information, so they can start formulating the information for a unified discussion.

She thanked the Excel representatives for attending the meeting tonight and she noted that she would read the information they distributed. She relayed that they were welcomed to bring any additional information before the committee at any time. And she encouraged them to come back as a group sometime in the future. She expressed that most important is the future of education.

Council member Torres commented that the information outlined in the packet was difficult to read. He referred to page-3 of the booklet and asked for an explanation of what the information meant. Upon the explanation by Ms. Zambrano, he said that the report was effective, although he found some of the outcomes somewhat depressing. He mentioned that the booklet should be distributed to parents for their information. Ms. Zambrano commented that although the outcomes seemed depressing, there are good outcomes as well.

Council member Torres asked if they analyze what the students are doing well. Ms. Zambrano said she has spoken to principals and parents. She explained that if they looked at the top five schools, they would find that they are the school of choice, noting that there are several things that some schools do differently than others, which contribute to the success and the high expectations.

Co-chair Taylor-Moye relayed that when her son was ready to graduate from high school, she questioned why he wasn't reading more. She said she realized that he was only at a second grade reading level, so she took the initiative to work with him on a

daily basis to improve his reading skills. She emphasized that education for the students is very important.

Council member Torres questioned if it would have helped to have the report they were given tonight, to see the progress of a student. Co-chair Taylor-Moye mentioned that the academic process in schools in the past related to the “*No Child Left Behind*” concept. However, there was an attitude of just moving the students along without tracking their progress.

Council member Feliciano asked about the three (3) focus goals at Excel Bridgeport, such as the focus of Advocacy and Policy. She questioned if there would be any upcoming informational sessions that the committee members could attend. She explained that she asked the question, because she has a 5-year old in the school system. Ms. Zambrano said they were in the process of creating the 2014 workshop calendar. She stated that it would cover how to instill literacy and it would cover Board of Education topics – *the information will be posted on their website*. Co-chair Taylor-Moye requested that the information also be distributed to the full city council.

Co-chair Taylor-Moye stated that she talked to Co-chair McBride-Lee about inviting Ms. Baraca of the Board of Education to a meeting. She made a request that each committee member should consider what items they would like to bring to the table for that meeting.

Council member Torres indicated his request(s):

- Invite school principals to discuss what is going on in their respective school

Council member Martinez suggested that the committee members draft their questions to those that they wanted to invite, so that they will have time to prepare for the discussion. She further emphasized the importance of working with the new Board of Education.

Co-chair Taylor-Moye indicated her request(s):

- Invite Lighthouse Program representative to discuss after school activities
- Invite Achievement First representative to discuss the long hours that students attend classes. *She commented however, that when she observed the students after school hours, she realized that they seemed energetic, so the hours apparently don't have any negative effect on them*

- She would like to gauge the amount of parental involvement in some of the schools – *she commented that she has already observed this at Caesar Batallia School.*

Co-chair McBride-Lee indicated her request(s):

- Invite teachers to come before the committee, particularly those that have been teaching for a number of years – *she relayed her issue with wanting to find out why the public schools don't approach academics the same as the charter schools do; such as test scores having to be at a certain level to qualify for the student selection lottery.*
- Invite teachers and parents for their input
- She would like to suggest conducting a “*Teacher for Day*” event, where they can shadow a teacher

Co-chair Taylor-Moye mentioned that a committee member can go to any school in a volunteer capacity.

Co-chair Taylor-Moye questioned if the schools on the south end of the city vs. the north end are at the same learning level. The consensus among the committee members was yes.

Council member Torres stated that at some point, he would like an explanation about the CMT performance test – i.e., what questions are on a typical test, how students are failing and at what level. Mr. Cabrera said he could provide that information. Council member Feliciano said she thought they would first need to know the curriculum of the classroom throughout the year and how they prepare to take the test before knowing the CMT test results.

Co-chair McBride-Lee relayed that generally, the top students are selected to attend the magnet schools, noting that the failing student wouldn't be eligible and they end up remaining in regular public school.

She stated that as far as the CMT test prep, pre-tests are sometimes given. She commented that for those students that might be new to the state or from another country where they may not know the language, she didn't feel that the CMT test was quite fair; since the student may not be acclimated to the questions that are outlined in the test.

Council member Martinez-Walker stated that she approached a couple of schools in her district to reach out to them with a list of her concerns related to their curriculum.

There was an open discussion related to various other issues that the committee members thought were plaguing the schools, such as teaching in a disruptive environment.

Co-chair Taylor-Moye emphasized that although there are problems that exist, they need to be on top of it and work together to improve things. She reiterated that Ms. Baraca of the BOE would be invited to attend a future meeting.

Co-chair Taylor-Moye acknowledged a School Resource Officer at Bassick High School that was present. He mentioned that there were supporting reasons why there are issues plaguing schools, such as teachers not being in touch with the population they are teaching. He relayed that if a teacher is not in touch, a student will try to take advantage of them. He suggested that there may be an opportunity for an out of work parent that may have a child in school, to possibly serve as a teacher support assistant.

Co-chair Taylor-Moye reiterated that it will be important to work with as many parties involved to improve things and get positive outcomes.

ADJOURNED

**** CO-CHAIR TORRES MOVED TO ADJOURN
** COUNCIL MEMBER McBRIDE-LEE SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Graham
Telesco Secretarial Services