

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 10, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Rev. John Olson, Co-Chair; Alfredo Castillo, Co-Chair; Kathryn Bukovsky, Jose Casco, Scott Burns, Nessah Smith, Aidee Nieves, Council President Thomas McCarthy

OTHERS: Ms. Frances Rabinowitz, Interim Superintendent of Schools; BOE Member Kevin McSpirit

CALL TO ORDER

Council Member Olson called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2016.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BURNS MOVED TO APPROVE THE COMMITTEE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2016.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER SMITH SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH SIX IN FAVOR (OLSON, CASTILLO, CASCO, BURNS, SMITH AND NIEVES) AND ONE ABSTENTION (BUKOVSKY).**

**General Discussion with Ms. Frances Rabinowitz, Interim Superintendent of Schools re:
Brief Update on the Bridgeport Schools.**

Council Member Olson said that this meeting was the result of a PBS interview that Council Member Olson had seen. He said that one particular school in Brockton, Massachusetts had been mentioned in the report. Council Member Olson said that he would like to have the Council Members go up to see the school.

Council Member Olson said that Mrs. Rabinowitz had commented that the only time that she was meeting with the Council was when she was asking for money for the budget.

Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she would have been in Bridgeport two years as of March 1st as Interim Superintendent and was uncomfortable with the fact that her only interaction with the Council Members was in the budget process. She thanked the Council Members for the extra million dollars the Council gave last year. There is now a nurse in every school and many of the schools have interventionists.

Mrs. Rabinowitz then presented her plan for the District, which has been underway since 2014. Council President McCarthy asked if Mrs. Rabinowitz was seeing an improvement in the student results due to the placement of interventionists in the various schools. She said that she was.

There are 37 schools in Bridgeport; 39 are elementary schools and there 7 high schools: Bassick, Central and Harding, along with the Fairchild Wheeler Magnet, the Bridgeport Aquaculture

Regional and Technology Center and Bridgeport Military Academy along with one alternative school, the Bridgeport Learning Center. She gave the current population break out in the District and noted that 3,000 Special Education students along with 13% ELL students.

Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she had worked in Bridgeport and then went to Hartford for the State and later worked in Hamden as the Superintendent. She is currently the Interim Superintendent and loves Bridgeport. She said that she believed that the schools were in much better shape than they were 15 years ago. The city has also changed, and much of the blight appears to have been removed. Roosevelt school just opened and it's a beautiful school. They hope to open the Rev. Clayton in 2017 as a magnet school with a STEAM theme.

Mrs. Rabinowitz then distributed copies of a document titled District Roadmap Beginning 2014-2015. (See attached.)

Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she was a stickler for high standards. There are over 500 non-tenured teachers in the District. Next week, Interim Superintendent Rabinowitz will begin meeting with every principal that has non-tenured teachers in their buildings to do evaluations.

The Roadmap was the result of what the staff and the parents arrived at as a vision for the District. She then reviewed the five Theories of Actions. It is nice to have programs, but programs don't cut it, it is the whole child that has to move forward. In the end, it has to be the administration and staff that make the changes.

Mrs. Rabinowitz said that in the beginning, she had to remove some school principals and the changes have happened. At Central, the suspensions have dramatically reduced.

Mrs. Rabinowitz spoke about Theory of Action 2 and said that she agreed with the Common Core Standards, but may argue with some of the content, particularly with the kindergarten and first grade materials.

The third Theory of Action involves a system of support. Right now there is an average of 29 students in a classroom. Class size is a major issue. With such a large sized class there is a possibility that a third of a class could be either special education students or other students in need of additional support. Last year's allocation from the Council helped the interventionists. As a result of not having enough interventionists, there are too many students who are being identified as Special Education.

The fourth Theory of Action is open and honest communication to the parents and community. She then listed some of the ways that the District reaches out to the parents. One of the iron clad rules is that phone calls should be returned within 24 hours.

The fifth Theory of Action is working together with the Board and the Council. She then spoke about the CJEFF case, which started 18 years ago in Bridgeport when a group of people were talking about the State funding allocations. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she spent two and a half days on the stand testifying about the case. She said that the funding formula is wrong. The Bridgeport students received \$6,000 less per capita than the Westport students. She said that she is hoping that the City administration and the Board can come together about this. Just to meet

the non-contractual obligations would cost 5.7 million and currently the Budget only has a \$600,000 deficit. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she is aware of the financial concerns of the City and the State. However, if the school wins CJEFF case, the State will appeal, so it may be years before things change.

Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she had copies of the End of Year Report, which she then distributed to the Committee Members. .

Last year, there were good outcomes in reading and math. The chronic absenteeism which are students who are out for 18 days of the year, dropped from 5,000 to 4,400. Out of school suspensions have dropped and the District has brought in a number of grants, such as getting iPads for many of the students. There are not many grants available.

Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she understands why Out of School Suspensions are needed, but feels that the students should be dealt with in a different way because Out of School Suspensions should be a last resort rather than a routine discipline measure. Bigelow Tea recently gave the District \$100,000 to work on an analysis of Out of School Suspensions.

Mrs. Rabinowitz said that universal Pre-K was a necessity. Right now, only 2/3rd of the children are attending. There are issues, such as locations and transportation.

Council Member Olson asked what Mrs. Rabinowitz's dream was. Mrs. Rabinowitz replied that the judge had offered her a choice between new schools and interventionists. While she wanted both and was aware that there were issues with boilers in some schools, she chose interventionists. It is important for all students to be able to read.

If she could have something, she said she felt that universal pre-school was very important. Even if the parents are just paying \$5.00 a week, that makes the parents have skin in the game. She said that it would be important to do some asset mapping to identify where the quality pre-school programs were. There is a difference between day care where the kids watch TV all day and quality pre-school.

Secondly, it is critical to insure that the students are reading fluently by grade 3. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she had visited a juvenile detention center where the 14 and 16 year olds were reading first and second grade books. She said that she was seeing progress with the students in terms of literacy.

Council Member Bukovsky asked how much money would be saved by hiring the interventionist. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that an interventionist costs \$180.00/day and they can work in groups of five. If the child is not identified, they could go through 12 years of Out of District placement which could cost the District 1.3 million. If they are identified in Special Education, it doubles the in district pupil cost. Once a child is identified as Special Ed or is placed out of District, they rarely return. She said that she could give the Council a quantitative study on this.

Council Member Burns asked about a special student. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that it was the Mark Bracket program from Yale. There will be a special address by Mr. Bracket in March.

Council Member Burns said he like the idea of a model urban district. He asked if there was a model urban district. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she had not found a model urban district, but she would like to visit Brockton. She added that there had been some good things in Meridan, Norwalk and New London, along with New Haven. She said that the system should not be different from the systems in Wilton or Westport. While the students are born into a zip code, but their level of service should be the same.

Council Member Casco said that it was nice to have Mrs. Rabinowitz present. He said that one of the parents that was removed from Central. He said that Mrs. Rabinowitz had mentioned grants and asked about the after school programs. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that the City was lucky to have the lighthouse program, but there was a great need for programs for the high school students and internships. There is a Pathways program that is moving forward, but not fully operational. The principals can work with the programs. The staff in the programs needs to have background checks and be finger printed. Discussion followed about the program.

Council Member Casco asked about the filling of vacancies and how the teachers are hired. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that there were a number of recruiters working on this. She said that she hires very few at the end of the students. However, some teachers start in Bridgeport, but get a better offer in the summer. Bridgeport loses about 200 teachers a year because of the working conditions. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she was working on this issue and to improve the situation. There are 11 vacancies in Math, Science and Special Education.

Council President McCarthy said that in previous years, the Board of Education often would not submit a budget to the Council. he said that while Superintendent Vallas has given the Council some budget information. He said that last year, Mrs. Rabinowitz had presented a budget and included some options, such as this amount would allow the District to do this, and this second amount would allow us to do that. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she would be presenting a non-discretionary budget and then some options.

SB thanked Mrs. Rabinowitz for her work. He said that he coaches track and was surprised to see that Central has an indoor track team. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that one thing that was hard was the lack of bands and now Harding has a music program again.

Council Member Olson said that the literacy issue seems to be some specific project that the Council could work on without large amounts of money. He suggested that Mrs. Rabinowitz make a list of small projects that perhaps the Council could work on. Mrs. Rabinowitz said that she really appreciated this opportunity to speak about the schools and not the money. She added that she is always upstairs and would be available to come down to talk to the Committee.

Council Member Casco said that he had sent her an email on October 15th and never received an answer. Mrs. Rabinowitz apologized for the oversight and asked that he re-send the email. He asked about the difference between bi-lingual instruction and ELL. Mrs. Rabinowitz explained that the ELL program was to teach students English that had limited or no English language skills, while the bi-lingual instruction was for students who were fluent in both language.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BUKOVSKY MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER SMITH SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes

Telesco Secretarial Services