

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING
MARCH 6, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Cathleen Simpson, George Estrada, Florisca Carter, Charles Valentino; Harry Weichsel, Ruben Felipe, Rev. William Marshal

OTHERS: Atty. Steven Mednick; Atty. Ed Maley, Superintendent Paul G. Vallas; Professor Joseph P. Viteritti, Attorney Allan B. Taylor; Mayor Bill Finch (6:15 p.m.), Atty. Mark Anastasi (6:45 p.m.)

CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Simpson called the meeting to order at 5:45 p.m. and announced that a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

February 23, 2012

**** MR. VALENTINO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 23, 2012 AS SUBMITTED.**

**** MR. FELIPE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

February 28, 2012

**** MR. VALENTINO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 28, 2012 AS SUBMITTED.**

**** MR. FELIPE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

FACT FINDING MEETING REGARDING EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

Chairwoman Simpson said that it had been decided that the presentations by the two invited speakers would be given before Superintendent Vallas made his presentation. Atty. Mednick gave a brief introduction about Atty. Taylor, who was present to address the Commission about his experiences as the Chair of the Hartford Charter Revision Commission in 1999 and again in 2002.

Mr. Felipe announced that there would be a lunch time outreach meeting that would allow public input at the North End Library on March 7, 2012 from 12:00 to 1:30 p.m.

Chairwoman Simpson said that there were brief biographies that would be attached to the minutes as part of the record.

PRESENTATION BY PROFESSOR JOSEPH P. VITERITTI, CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF URBAN AFFAIRS AND PLANNING, HUNTER COLLEGE.

Professor Joseph Viteritti, said that he had been involved in school governance issues for many years. He then reviewed his various activities in this area.

Professor Viteritti said that he was not present to tell Bridgeport what to do, but to help Bridgeport decide what to do. He said that as he was involved in writing his book, he came to the conclusion that the Mayor should be put in charge of the schools. He arrived at this conclusion after serving on the New York City Chancellor's staff during Mayor Edward Koch's administration. In Boston, he observed a similar phenomenon where there was tension between the Board and City Hall and Mayor Koch's reluctance to provide funds without any kind of accountability or oversight. More people vote for the Mayor and know the Mayor than know who is on the School Board. Schools don't exist in a vacuum. Without having the Mayor as part of the Board as Chancellor, or CEO, it is difficult to coordinate what happens with the Board. However, this idea was largely ignored until 2002 when Mayor Bloomberg decided to initiate a study on this.

The study was focused on mayoral control and looking at what happened in other cities. Papers were commissioned on the subject, which later became a book called "When Mayors Take Control." There are many different shapes and sizes of governance plans in this proposal. The new systems in other cities, like New Haven, Trenton, Chicago, Boston and others have worked out.

The concept of accountability that is implied when speaking of mayoral control is often vague. Professor Viteritti then went on to give brief synopsis of how different mayoral models are set up. If Mayoral control is going to be used, be sure that it is mayoral control and not something else. If it is called mayoral control, the mayor needs to pick the majority of the Board members.

As with all change, there is always disagreement, controversy and problems. Mayoral control in other cities has gotten strong support from the business community. Often the business community has become more involved. Dissent often comes from poor minority communities. While it doesn't make it less democratic, the idea is often perceived as a loss of local elected school officials. He gave an example as to what happened in Boston. Boston has been one of the examples of successful mayoral control.

There is no evidence that mayoral control will raise or lower test scores. Professor Viteritti then reviewed the 4th Grade NAPE Reading scores nationally and indicated which cities in the top five cities, some of which had mayoral control and others that did not. There was no consistent

pattern. He listed some external factors that could affect the test scores and also pointed out that what was occurring in governance could affect the reading scores.

What mayoral control did in the cities that adopted it was it created a capacity for change that had not existed before. It often can overcome bureaucratic inertia. Because it directs the politics towards City Hall, it allows the Superintendent to be a Superintendent.

Because mayoral control concentrates power so much, checks and balances are needed. One consistent argument has been that the Mayor has too much power. Another one is that there is no community or parental input. However, those who were strongly against mayoral control were reluctant to return to the old board system after the mayoral control paradigm has been instituted.

In order to get a sense of how the new system was working, there needed to be a way to get a sense of what was going on. Some cities developed an independent unit to perform evaluations.

Mayoral control is not a solution for urban school issues. In some ways, it is a project of frustration with the old system. It is more of an enabler than a solution. There are certain lessons to be drawn from Boston, one being strong and continual relationship between the Mayor and Superintendent. The Mayor does not get involved in educational issues frequently. He has also made some very good choices for appointments. Massachusetts had a strong state curriculum.

Mayoral control requires a good system and good appointments. It is important to have a focus on basic skills, extensive accountability, best practices and teacher training.

Professor Viteritti concluded by saying that he believed that Bridgeport had already made a good decision in selecting Mr. Vallas. Having this type of meeting to discuss the issue and consider issues is a major step forward.

**PRESENTATION BY ATTORNEY ALLAN B. TAYLOR, CHAIR, HARTFORD
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSIONS (1999-2000 AND 2002).**

Attorney Allan B. Taylor then introduced himself and said that the State Board of Education has no position at all on this issue. He then gave a brief overview of his work experience. He said that he was elected to the Hartford City Council for a number of years during the 1980's. In 1989, he decided to participate in school board. Atty. Taylor then said that the Board many issues and challenges. The Board was not able to maintain a working majority and subsequently fractured. In 1994, Atty. Taylor was appointed to the State Board of Education and watched the State take over the Hartford Board of education. In 1999, the City empanelled a Charter Revision Commission and Atty. Taylor was on the Commission. The Charter was on the ballot in December, and failed to make the required figures for approval. In 2002, Atty. Taylor was on a second Charter Revision Commission and the charter revision passed.

Many of the issues that were experienced by Hartford Board of Education were similar to what Professor Viteritti described. He said that when he was on the Hartford Board of Education, the Board routinely requested 10% - 15% more than the previous year and then backing the budget into what it received. When he suggested that the Hartford Board request only be 8%, there was a major backlash.

Having an elected Board puts pressure on the elected members from the community. Changing the system is difficult and requires strong leadership, which is almost impossible to obtain in on fully elected Board. By linking the schools with the Mayor, it would draw more attention since the mayor would have a vested interest. The relationship between the Hartford school unions and the Board had been beyond toxic and Atty. Taylor said that he was envious of the relationship that New Haven had with the Superintendent, the Mayor and the unions. When the funding is appropriated, the Board of education is responsible for how it is spent, even when there is mayoral control.

The charter revisions and changes in the School governance in Hartford passed overwhelmingly. This has allowed the school district to reap many benefits. When a new appointed superintendent came in, changes were made that no one could have imagined. An elected board would have not been able to appoint someone with the same credentials. The school system and the City now share resources. That would not have happened without the realization that it was one City and that the results show that Hartford has improved over the last few years. Graduation and test scores are up and drop out rates are down. Atty. Taylor said that he was not aware of any significant desire in Hartford to return to the previous system.

The one item that Atty. Taylor hoped for was that when Hartford went into the State takeover, the lowest number of votes to be elected to the BOE was 1,400 votes. This low number in a city the size of Hartford means that someone can be elected on a fluke. The democratic control and investment on the school system may come about by focusing on the mayoral elections.

Unlike New York City, there is much more input from the public sector since the New York City School System has twice as many students as the entire State of Connecticut.

Mayor Finch left the meeting at this point.

**PRESENTATION BY PAUL G. VALLAS, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS,
BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT**

Superintendent Vallas then spoke briefly about the battle he had with consortium in Chicago and then he created a consortium in Philadelphia.

Superintendent Vallas said that he had been asked to come into Bridgeport to help. He said that he believed that Bridgeport could be a model district simply because it wasn't a glamorous city

or a big name district. But the District also does not have the resources to bring to the table. These are Districts, which are in every state, that see a decreasing property tax base and struggles to make the system work. There are hundreds of districts throughout the country. A difference can be made here in Bridgeport and it could be a model for the rest of the country. The Governor is interested in increasing revenues for education and improving education in the State.

The objective is to close the budget hole, which is almost done, and to bring long term financial stability. Budgets should be school improvement plans. One question that is always asked is if reforms are instituted, whether these will be changed when the Board changes. The City is going to have to improve the schools, reform the system and raise the standards or else lose the State funding. The Governor has tied additional funding to school reform. A financial and school reform plan will eventually be presented to the City, the State that will stabilize the financials and be accountable.

The State Superintendent can identify District that are not performing and literally take over the District indefinitely. The plan that will be submitted that will meet the State and City's specifications.

Balancing the budget and developing a long term financial plan provides a stability for the staff and students. No matter how good the model is, unless it is sustainable, it will fail. The budget must be designed so that the money follows the students. This means that the Central Office decreases and the local schools expand. This needs to be done in a transparent and equitable manner.

The Central Office needs to evolve into a School Improvement Department. Part of the strategy includes redesigning the Central Office to have a mission to provide the training, the resources, the data and financial stability they need.

Local control is critical. He then listed a number of improvements that happened in Philadelphia, New Orleans and Chicago. Charter schools in New Orleans were first requested by public schools and public teachers because the New Orleans School Board seems incapable of reopening the schools. It doesn't matter if a school is a charter school or a public school, the governance issue determines how well a system works.

Five key points are: Superior curriculum, data to evaluate the student progress, strong local leadership, teacher training, intervention and school leadership is critical. Every school in New Orleans has a local governing board, even the public schools. The governing board is the one who chooses the superintendent and other key leaders.

When a school is failing, there needs to be a mechanism that allows the community to intervene and correct the problem. When there is mayoral control, there is more decisive action. However, parental councils can also be incorporated. The Mayor would have ultimate responsibility, along with the Council, for the school.

Superintendent Vallas pointed out that the mayoral control occurred in large cities that had districts that were in trouble. Local elected school boards can become detached, also. Sometimes, there are issues that separate the Board from the community. If the Mayor has responsibility of the schools, then his/her longevity will depend on the success of the schools. Having parental autonomy will also be important. The more choices available to the parents, the better the system. Identifying best practices and models is one thing, but the community must make the decision. People are very concerned about school reform both at the local level and the State level.

RECESS

Chairwoman Simpson announced a recess at 7:07 p.m. 7:20 p.m.

COMMISSION QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD

The speakers were asked if they had seen any examples of failed mayoral control? Superintendent Vallas pointed out that if there is a good mayor, the district will reflect that. There needs to be checks and balances. Prof. Viteritti said that Detroit was a spectacular failure. The system lacked credibility and there were many other serious issues that undercut the legitimacy of the mayoral control. He reiterated that mayoral control is not the total cure for the problems urban schools are facing.

Rev. Marshall asked Superintendent Vallas about his three points and said that the first two; Balanced budget and control were stated but the third point was not mentioned. Superintendent Vallas said that the first point was to create a financial plan based on money following the student to the schools; the second, organizational control, and the third was to designed a series of reform with the five essential practices.

By making sure that all the schools have the following five key points: superior curriculum, data to evaluate the student progress; strong local leadership; teacher training, intervention and school leadership is critical with a stable financial structure.

Mr. Felipe thanked the panel for their input. He then said that most of the research offered two major obstacles, one of which is lack of parental involvement. The second one is selecting the board members.

Professor Viteritti said that Boston has a screening panel. However, governance is the key. If the leadership is good, then the board appointments should follow.

Atty. Taylor said that if the mayor has control, then the Mayor is accountable. A nomination committee would dilute that.

Superintendent Vallas said that there was no pre-screening in the cities he had worked in. However, some mayors were presented with a slate of candidates and this resulted in the mayors delaying the appointments if they didn't like the candidates. There are many positive aspects to having the Mayor having a majority control of the Board or total control. Since the Mayor ultimately has the decision on how much money the district gets, he needs to have a strong means of input.

If the funding is attached to the individual students, incidents such as having a school lose 20 - 30 % of their population but still not change will not happen. If a system that has best practices in place, there is a degree of having the good schools replacing the failing schools. This will act as insurance against poor leadership.

It was pointed out Superintendent V was present because of a failure and has an appointed school board. Superintendent V said that having an appointed board helps, but it was clear that the system had already collapsed. Rather than study the plan for a year, it was time to make decisive changes. Nothing produces more success like previous success. Momentum is important.

Atty. Taylor said that the question was whether Superintendent Vallas would be here, but the real question was whether the District would have recruited Superintendent Vallas.

Professor Viteritti commented that when the topic of Mayoral control comes up, it indicates that there was a problem present.

Commissioner Weichsel said that he was more confused than when he started. He said that he had come to Bridgeport at the age of 9 without speaking a word of English. He said that he received an excellent education, but could not understand why there was not more accountability. He asked about the accountability and the quality of the teachers in the system.

Superintendent Vallas said that the race to the top was all about evaluating teachers and removing ineffective teachers. Many states are moving towards eliminating tenure laws, such as Florida, and New Jersey. Eliminating the obstacles to removing ineffective teachers is gathering momentum nationwide. Superintendent Vallas said that he taught in the military for a number of years and was amazed at the level that the military was able to institutionalize quality instruction. It also assists in compiling the reasons to remove an ineffective teacher. It is more than just removing ineffective teachers; it is about installing best practices. There is a difference between knowing what to do and actually doing it, and knowing what to do and failing to do it.

When asked how to increase the parental involvement, Superintendent Vallas said that in Chicago, there were parental checklists that went out quarterly. These lists were developed by trained parents who could reach out to the other parents. Parents would also work within the schools via small stipends. When parents can serve as role models, it is very effective.

Another thing that was done was partnering with organizations, including the faith based organizations. This helped when the staff had to reach out to the parents; it was easier with the assistance of the organizations. Poor parents care just as much as affluent parents, but they often are single parents and struggling with other issues, such as hold multiple jobs.

He spoke about the instructional improvement system that he hoped to institute in Bridgeport. This will allow the parents to have access to the information about their children via technology. This will also provide instructional support to the parents.

Chairwoman Simpson said that she learned a great deal from the speakers.

Profess V said that anyone could go into a school and ask any student who the good teachers are and which ones to avoid. He then spoke about the standardized testing and curriculum. The capital should be invested in methods that makes teachers better. Superintendent Vallas agreed.

Rev. Marshall asked about what should be implemented in the Charter to assist in making it a better system. Atty. Taylor said that State Law sets what the BOE does. The Charter can set the frame work.

Ms. Carter asked about the relationship of testing and the curriculum. Professor Vallas said that due to political influences, the testing was done first, rather than the curriculum. Massachusetts was head of the curve on this. However, they were baffled by Race to the Top since they already had developed a state core curriculum.

Ms. Carter asked how the members of the Chicago Consortium were selected. Superintendent Vallas said that they had been selected before he arrived. He then reviewed the details.

Ms. Carter asked about the local governing team. Superintendent Vallas said that there was a state mandate for governance and the councils were fairly weak. He said that he would want the councils to weigh in on principals, or look at the budget documents. There will be clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Professor Viteritti said that engaging the parents in a meaningful way that did not devolve into a mess is really difficult.

Mr. Marshal thanked the panel. He said that there was currently a nine member board and asked if it should be increased. Atty. Taylor said that he would strongly discourage any increase. He stressed that having a coherent plan and sticking to it would be much better. Professor Viteritti agreed.

When asked whether it would be good to have half appointed and half elected, Superintendent Vallas spoke about the New Orleans situation where there was three members appointed by the Governor and six locally elected members. The Mayor needs to have representation, if not control on the Board.

Professor Viteritti spoke about term limits and whether or not the Mayor should be able to remove board members.

Superintendent Vallas encouraged the Commission to allow the Mayor to choose his candidates rather than presenting a slate of candidates.

Mr. Valentino said that the Commission members had major representation from the city. He said that this current board was a very good board. Superintendent Vallas said that whatever system was used to create the board should be used for the Board. He then spoke about schools that do not necessarily feed into colleges. He mentioned work study electives and apprenticeship electives. This would be a dual track system.

Mr. Estrada thanked Professor Viteritti for his insights. He agreed that governance should be an enabler, not an obstacle.

Mr. Estrada said that Bridgeport had a colorful political history. He then asked what would contribute to the transparency and financial controls, along with the stability. Atty. Taylor said that ultimately it was a democracy. He mentioned that an independent audit commission was created in Hartford. It would be important to make the system as clear as possible so that it would work.

Professor Viteritti agreed. He said that writing the charter was not sexy, but extremely important. Giving people the authority to do their jobs is primary and then having checks and balances would be secondary to make the system work.

Superintendent Vallas said that he believed that the State would institutionalize the failing schools by taking them over. Having a best model and best practices would be key. He mentioned that New Orleans created a 501c3 organization to reconstitute the schools. There are many people who want to contribute money to educational reform in Bridgeport, but they want accountability. Working with the businesses and the Chamber will be important. So much of the funding comes from the State.

Ms. Carter said that Moms Mobley had often said that if we keep doing what we have always done, we will continue to get what we've always gotten. It behooves Bridgeport residents to do something different so that it is an improvement.

Mr. Weichsel asked if it would make any sense to have uniform dress codes. Atty. Taylor said that this would be something for the Board of Education.

Atty. Mednick announced that at the next meeting on Thursday, there will only be one speaker.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. WEICHSEL MOVED TO ADJOURN.
** MR. ESTRADA SECONDED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services