

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 8, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Denese Taylor Moye, Chair; Manuel Ayala; Rev. Olson; Andre Baker; Richard Bonney, Council President Thomas McCarthy

OTHERS: Council Member AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia; Council Member Sue Brannelly; Council Member Leticia Colon, Council Member Michelle Lyons; Mary Lou Marshall, John Lee Marshall

CALL TO ORDER

Council Member Taylor Moye called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

October 13, 2011 Minutes – These were tabled to the next meeting.

November 22, 2011– These were tabled to the next meeting.

INFORMATION SESSION WITH SUPERINTEND

Superintendent Vallas greeted the members of the Committee and other Council Members.

On Monday, a plan will be submitted to the Board regarding reconciling the budget this year. Currently, the deficit has been reduced from 12 million to 4 million. Superintendent Vallas said that this reduction has been done without impacting the students. There is some participation by the State to facilitate this reduction.

On the second week in March, a five year financial plan will be presented to the Board and Superintendent Vallas said that he wanted to brief the Committee about this in advance. While the District will not have all the money they would like, Superintendent Vallas said that he believed that the District will have enough money to move the District forward. Every financial document should also be an educational plan. Now that there is a sense of what the State will be giving the District, it is easier to plan.

The five year document will also provide the parameters for collective bargaining. Superintendent Vallas then listed a number of venues where he dealt with these types of financial crises, such as Chicago, Philadelphia and New Orleans.

He said that he hoped that this budget plan would allow for reforms. Superintendent Vallas said that the Early Childhood program is geared towards newborns to kindergarten. A strategy is being developed for creating a standardized curriculum citywide. By standardizing the curriculum, the teachers and students have more continuity.

Superintendent Vallas said that he had brought Ms. Sandy Case, who was a former New York City curriculum administrator. Once a standardized curriculum plan is introduced and the teachers are trained, the test scores will improve. He spoke about plans to have intense instruction through to the end of June. A better assessment system is needed, but it will be done with the present school staff and teachers.

Regarding the high schools, Superintendent Vallas said that he had been speaking with the various colleges and universities who are willing to provide graduate students for placement in the high school classrooms as either co-teachers or coaches. Each one of the colleges is willing to allow for dual enrollment. The colleges and universities have scholarships for students who maintain their grades and meet certain financial criteria. The new multi-plex high school will contain 3 different academies.

In order to eliminate the drop out rate, a specific program for credit recovery and job training will be created. Meetings with the U.S. Department of Labor and various other job training agencies will be scheduled.

There are many resources available that have not been engaged. By keeping the students in school, the amount of funding will increase.

The basic building blocks for the District's recovery are:

- Early Childhood Education
- Core Curriculum
- Credit Recovery, and
- Partnership with the colleges and universities

On the capital side, there may be some flexibility in terms of capital construction. Superintendent Vallas said that he would be trying to accelerate the construction projects. There may be some school consolidation issues in order to provide swing space for some students. Creating enthusiasm and momentum is critical.

As the ECS system is reformed, the Board will be at the table.

Superintendent Vallas said that he was promised support and expects that support. It will be a modest amount but it needs to be there.

Council Member Taylor Moye asked if the curriculum would be city wide. Superintendent Vallas said that it would, and the training funds have already been raised. Having a consistent curriculum addresses the issues of mobility as students move from school to school.

Council Member Taylor Moye asked when the training would be started. Superintendent Vallas said that it would start before the end of the year and that it would be ongoing. It doesn't take a very long time. The math curriculum will probably be the Singapore Math, one of the best math programs in the world. The training can be done in the school. If a teacher is absent more than 10 days, the quality of the students' instruction reverts to the level of a first year teacher. The graduate students can use the pacing guides if the primary instructor is absent.

Council President McCarthy said that he was pleased with the handling of the finances. Previously, there were consistent problems with the BOE budget. The recent hiring of two financial people is a major step towards building confidence.

Council President McCarthy asked about the multi- high school with three academies. Superintendent Vallas said that there were three specialized high schools that the community had chosen, such as green technology. He then spoke about previous high schools that he had created, such as one in Orleans Parish, Noble School in Chicago and Philadelphia. By using the core curriculum and character development, the schools will become good schools. By letting the community choose the model and the themes for the high schools and using a core curriculum, test scores are improving.

Council Member Lyons asked about students with ADD and ADHD. She said that over the years, many of the physical classes, such as home ec or music have been lost from the schools. Superintendent Vallas spoke about the RTI (Response to Intervention) program, which allows the students be grouped by their performance level for a portion of the day. The tier program allows for interventions and for instruction for the gifted students.

The city is spending 14 million dollars on 300 Special Education students that are out of district, which is draining the District. Many of those students are over diagnosed or over medicated. He spoke about attempting to bring some of the students back into District and partnering them with a local school based program. The current system is not working. Discussion followed about the details of the various special education students.

Council Member Lyons asked about the amount of testing and the decrease in actual instructional time. Superintendent Vallas said that it would be important to remove duplicate or redundant testing. Simple benchmark testing should be quizzes, not high stakes tests. The testing model has distorted the instruction. However, by using quizzes prudently, rather than one major test on which everything depends, the students are better prepared. The students don't need additional testing burdens.

Council Member Lyons then pointed out that her grandson had needed extra work in comprehensive learning and that it had cost the family a significant sum for the outside tutoring. Superintendent Vallas said that with the RTI program, the extra instruction would be provided by the school without outside support or cost.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia thanked Superintendent Vallas for his efforts. Going back to the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic requires that the teacher has the power in the classroom. As the students improve their work, they move through the tiers. Superintendent Vallas agreed.

Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia then spoke about the component programs for Central, Bassick and Harding. Original programs such as business or health were there, later changed and then the programs eventually abandoned.

Superintendent Vallas said that there were work programs and other programs that could be re-instituted. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia expressed concerns about the vocational education classes. Discussion followed about the details of these types of programs. Expanding choice through technology and site consolidation. Programs are discontinued when the student enrollment drops. By consolidation, the programs can be maintained.

Council Member Baker asked about the swing space and expressed concerns about schools with reduced enrollment. Superintendent Vallas said that he approached this type of program by phasing out schools. He then gave an example of three schools that need serious repair. They are close to each other, so perhaps one school will be phased out after the construction.

Council Member Baker asked about a recent shift of the school building from the BOE to the City for maintenance. Superintendent Vallas said that he thought this would be good and the City can maintain the buildings.

Council Member Olsen asked if UB was one of the universities that was participating. Superintendent Vallas said that UB was involved.

Council Member Olsen asked if Superintendent Vallas knew whether an elected Board or an appointed Board was better. Superintendent Vallas said that either was good because it's really the personalities on the Board. However micro-management and over-involvement of the Board members in hiring and firing, or which contractors are awarded contracts can be a problem. He added that he felt the Mayors should have a greater role in the District. A system of checks and balances is needed. Local control is a major issue.

Council Member Taylor Moye then said that when the special education students are labeled through the system, the students are sent to CES and other outside institutions. Superintendent Vallas said that the District will bring these students back into the District and to handle their education

ADJOURNMENT

- ** COUNCIL MEMBER BONNEY MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- ** COUNCIL MEMBER OLSEN SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services