

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
EDUCATION and SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2011**

**6:30 PM**

ATTENDANCE: Council members: Taylor-Moye; Co-chair, Brantley; Co-chair  
Baker, McCarthy

NON-COMMITTEE: Council members: Brannelly, dePara

STAFF: Tom White

Informational Session with Bob Trefry, President, Board of Education re:  
Plans for the Board of Education.

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

Bob Trefry distributed copies of a handout for informational purposes.

Mr. Trefry stated he would give an update about things going on in the school district.  
He stated there was emphasis on closing the achievement gap.

*He referenced the overhead slides and commented about various topics as follows:*

- 98.60% qualify for free/reduced lunch
- they look at early education – it was noted that 67% have exposure to preschool;  
compared to Fairfield at 97%
- disparities were highlighted between Bridgeport and the state for math, reading  
and writing – it was noted that the statewide percentage is low with the 10<sup>th</sup> grade  
average 10.3%

- the dropout rate is 66% for graduating students; compared to 90% statewide – it was commented that by the time a student gets to high school, they are so far behind that they become discouraged and don't feel they can succeed

Mr. Trefry mentioned that there are three important things to look at regarding education –*the state constitution was referenced:*

1. *the right to free secondary and elementary education*
2. *they can't discriminate against kids and they have equal protection under the law; regardless of religion, race or color*
3. *funding is mentioned in relation to how the money should be distributed with justice and equity – the case of "Brown vs. Board of Education was cited as an example to point out equitable education*

Mr. Trefry stated that they were eliminating all BOE committees and they no longer approve principals, rentals of buildings or field trips. He emphasized that student achievement is the first priority. He said they will advocate for equality in funding and hold each person accountable for doing their job and ensuring that the students are well educated.

He highlighted the standards that have priority:

- Academics – students must have basic skills
- Citizenship – to exercise their rights
- Personal Management – Boston public schools looked at students that went to college and they studied their character to determine if they will finish college. And personal management was found to be crucial for long term occupation readiness - *It was stated that a Baccalaureate diploma was found to be key and advanced placement courses are encouraged.*

They plan to execute academic achievement by looking at what is expected among leaders, parents and prospective employers – to elicit expectations; such as: passing certain tests implemented for seniors to be ready for college courses – *he commented that remediation classes were needed for some students.*

Co-chair Taylor-Moye asked how the parents receive all the information. Mr. Trefry said everything is done through the schools. He noted that they've had a good turnout with parent involvement.

Co-chair Taylor-Moye asked if they concluded how students will get books, computer training etc., noting that many don't have the materials they need to do their homework. Mr. Trefry said they haven't discussed these matters yet.

Mr. Trefry explained that they will look at measuring results and they will look at the culture of the school and how to engage parents and students. They will also look at corporate involvement and how they can work together with charter schools – *it was noted that student achievement and work groups will be created to accomplish their goals.*

He expressed that one program they talked about is looking for funding to administer a test to seniors, which will gauge their readiness to take college courses. They will do a PILOT with seniors at Harding that will spread to other high schools next year. Co-chair Brantley asked if the plan was already in place. Mr. Trefry said it will cost approximately \$30k to implement and currently, they are deciding how fund it.

Funding was reviewed:

- Resources to reach goals
- Efficient use of resources
- Just and equitable funding

Mr. Trefry reviewed the chart displayed regarding how all districts in the state spend their money (*expenditures broken down per child*):

20,254 students/Bpt – they took the amount and it was broken down by categories and how much was spent per student – there was a large disparity between what Bridgeport spends in relation to other municipalities; for example:

\$265,347,654 / Bridgeport *compared to*

\$57.7 million more /Hartford

*\*Overall, Bridgeport spends \$10 million less in administration and support.*

He commented that they referred to the Gibson study and they are still looking for efficiencies. He explained there is a difference over an 8-year period Re: there is a cumulative difference in expenditures between other municipalities and Bridgeport public schools.

Council member dePara asked if he had a breakdown of state funding to Bridgeport, New Haven and Hartford. Mr. Trefry said yes. Council member dePara asked if the state's portion of funding for those municipalities was higher than Bridgeport. Mr. Trefry said it's lower for Bridgeport for education funding per pupil. He noted that the calculation is: \$24 million /Hartford and \$15 million /New Haven.

Mr. Trefry reviewed the CT Coalition for Justice in Education Funding – he commented that it should be equitable and adequate. He further commented that Bridgeport has the least in adequate funding and it was found to be approximately \$32 million short when they took the lawsuit into consideration.

He reviewed the education cost sharing formula that takes the same amount per pupil times the enrollment. It was found to be 10% higher and the wealth factor decreases the amount.

He reviewed the current ECS Entitlement as a percentage of fully funded grant percentages that vary among larger cities – this results in a financial impact between 88.4% and 90.8%.

He mentioned Additional ECS Funding - it was noted that the deficit is down by \$6.5 million due to concessions made and the city put in \$2 million. He stated that there won't be any pay increases this year and they also found an additional \$2 million. He noted that if they laid off social workers, they will have (29) students for only one counselor.

Mr. Trefry indicated that it's not an inefficient system, but they are looking to make it more efficient.

Council member dePara suggested that the BOE submit monthly financial statements to give the committee and city council a better pulse of where funding is going and how effective it is. Mr. Trefry said they were currently understaffed in the finance area; however, they have discussed providing an analysis in the near future. Council member dePara emphasized that he would like Mr. Trefry to seriously consider his suggestion. He reiterated that seeing the monthly budget will be extremely helpful, especially during budget season.

Council member dePara also asked if the BOE had any interest in adding to the grants writing department. He stated that while the current person has done a good job; better staffing would greatly improve BOE funding options. Mr. Trefry said he made the following requests: 1) finance person 2) grants office 3) project management help to run more efficiently.

Council member Baker asked about a breakdown of grants comparing other cities. Mr. Trefry said other cities typically receive more; it's done by formula. Council member Baker stated that it was crucial to seek additional grant monies. Mr. Trefry agreed. He reiterated that they were experiencing a lack of staff to pursue more grants. He commented that when a grant comes in, it's used to fund day to day operations.

Council member Baker asked what the ideas were for partnering with corporations for grant monies. Mr. Trefry said corporations generally look to fund work groups.

Mr. Trefry discussed the termination of the superintendent's contract that will be in effect until December 31. He noted that he receives one year compensation and health benefits for himself and his spouse. He clarified that it was an existing contract that had to be honored.

He relayed that they began the process for search firms, but they won't act on it until they hear from the court on whether or not the Board of Education will stay. Then there's the matter of transition that will be discussed next Monday to determine if they should look for an internal or external person and someone who will maintain the status quo. They also met with community groups, unions and the Mayor to identify candidates for interviews. They will seek out those that have had turnaround success in the inner-district. He said he talked to some potential candidates that will take on the commitment on a temporary basis, not permanently. He felt a temporary basis would be good, because it will allow for fresh evolving input.

Council member Baker said he appreciated Mr. Trefry's time coming out to speak to the committee and sharing the information. He asked what the council can do to be more supportive in working with the BOE to raise the achievement gap. Mr. Trefry said one thing they can do is not be adverse to change. He said he would keep them apprised of the search and he will follow up with new initiatives that are started. He further noted that he will bring information to the committee if it's requested.

Co-chair Taylor-Moye expressed why it's important to continue with the Informational sessions, especially since the information is provided first hand by Mr. Trefry. She said it's crucial to keep them updated of any future changes for the betterment of the students. She said they're in limbo now, until they hear from the court as to whether the BOE will be reinstated. Mr. Trefry commented that they shouldn't recruit a permanent superintendent until the court matter is resolved. However, the interim superintendent could accomplish some progress in the meantime.

Mr. Trefry said the state task force is looking to make changes to the ECS (Education Cost Savings) – they will look at the wealth formula as a guide. Overall, he said he felt

the city council will be helpful by being supportive; in conjunction with the Mayor to be heard at the state level regarding adequate funding to take care of the kids.

Council member Brannelly asked if the \$2 million he mentioned was for in-kind services. Mr. Trefry said yes; it's for in-kind services, crossing guards and the sale of the building – *the Board of Education will receive the proceeds.*

Council member Brannelly asked about the lawsuit. She questioned why the BOE didn't take legal action to get fair equitable funding. Mr. Trefry responded that the process could be frustrating. He mentioned a current court case that has been delayed for at least two years. He clarified that the matter involves obtaining an injunction to expedite the process. He mentioned the case of Chef vs. O'Neil and used the analogy of "*stopping the bleeding to stabilize the patient to make real progress*"; he said this is how they're looking to address the problems.

Council member Brannelly asked about renegotiating the contract for the interim superintendent based on goal achievement. Mr. Trefry said it's common in education to tie the compensation level in the district to the performance in the district. He stressed that they have to see movement to receive comparable compensation that is based on metrics and numbers.

Co-chair Brantley questioned with the new board in place and looking at bringing in a new superintendent; given the state of the financial situation, how will the contract be drawn up. Mr. Trefry said that the contract is usually written uniquely for the individual, but it's not uncommon for the person to receive medical coverage.

Co-chair Brantley emphasized that paying someone's medical coverage until 65 years old is excessive; especially when the kids aren't being properly funded. She further stated that there weren't any major strides made by the former superintendent. Mr. Trefry responded that the former superintendent has done some good things; however, the issue of the contract terms is negotiable.

Co-chair Brantley stressed that she would still like the board to look at the contract terms carefully, with emphasis on weighing varied factors.

She questioned if the board should be in place and elected by the people, how would this be done. Mr. Trefry said if the court reverses the decision, a special election may be held or the lower court may act on it to make a decision.

Council member Brannelly asked if the Supreme Court has given any timing of the decision. Mr. Trefry said no.

Council member Brannelly mentioned the prior animosity that existed between the city and the Board of Education and how it had a negative impact. She expressed the hope that that condition would be alleviated and cooperation trickles down through the process to make effective efficiency changes. She added that she hoped to see the fluid process continue.

She mentioned the issue of take home vehicles that has resulted in an exorbitant expense. She emphasized that the taxpayers shouldn't be paying for these types of expenses. Mr. Trefry responded that relations with the city has improved and there has been discussion how they will approach other changes. As far as take home vehicles, he said they have been eliminated.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BRANTELY MOVED TO ADJOURN  
\*\* COUNCIL MEMBER BAKER SECONDED  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting adjourned at 7:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Graham  
Telesco Secretarial Services