

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING**

**MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 2011**

**A special meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held on Monday, January 31, 2011, in the auditorium of Mt. Hope High School, 199 Chestnut Street in Bristol, RI. The Chairperson, John C. Bento, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:10 PM.**

**Present: John C. Bento, Chair, Paul Silva, Vice-Chair, William M. O'Dell, Treasurer, Denise R. Arsenault, Diana B. Campbell, Marjorie J. McBride, Susan Rancourt and John P. Saviano; Melinda L. Thies, Superintendent; Mario J. Andrade, Assistant Superintendent; Pauline A. Silva, Director of Administration and Finance; Mary N. Almeida, Director of Literacy and Title I; and Leslie J. Anderson, Director of Pupil Personnel Services**

**Absent: Karen A. Lynch**

**OPENING BUSINESS**

**All present were invited to join in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.**

**PRESENTATION BY COMMISSION GIST ON THE FUNDING FORMULA**

**Chairperson Bento opened the meeting by thanking Commissioner Gist for keeping her promise and taking the difficult road to return to discuss the funding formula, although he does not support the Commissioner on the funding formula. Mr. Bento set the ground rules for discussion, barring rudeness and insensitivity. He stated the funding formula is now law which only the state legislators can change; Mr. Bento hopes we will learn enough to modify the formula one to three years from now. Mr. Bento then introduced the community leaders present, as well as the School Committee members, and then the Superintendent.**

**Superintendent Thies, on behalf of the District, welcomed Commissioner Gist and thanked her and her staff for providing data to the District and for their willingness to return to answer some tough questions on the funding formula; she said the people in this community feel strongly and passionately about the education we provide our children.**

**Mrs. Thies commented it is about outcomes, which the District has been very successful at providing; Bristol Warren has been a very wise investment. The centerpiece of everything we do is student achievement; every year we have made consistent benchmark gains in NECAP, maintained steady upward progress and have embraced education reform, especially at the high school level, Mt. Hope High**

**School being a major designer of PBGR. We have reduced our dropout rate by 12 %, many of our classrooms are lab classrooms which other districts visit; we offer a comprehensive program. Regionalization came forward to expand opportunities for all Warren and Bristol students and we offer a variety of opportunities for all students to be successful, many more than could be offered if separate systems. We have been a model of fiscal responsibility, at 20% co-share for health benefits and a redesigned health care plan; in the past three years we have reduced full time employees by 19% and now have a triple A bond rating. 55% of our budget goes toward direct instruction, equal to Barrington and Westerly. Mrs. Thies noted we all are here as a team.**

**Funding Formula Implementation Presentation by Commissioner Gist**  
**Commissioner Gist said the District has so much to be proud of educationally and on an operational level—not only what shows up in measures, but also what is provided to students in the arts. At the formula’s inception, the Board of Regents set many guided principles before doing any calculations, some being:**

- 1) Build a strong foundation for education for all students in the State**
- 2) Improve equity among schools across the State in the distribution of funds**
- 3) Be transparent and consistent**
- 4) Be financially responsible**
- 5) Use New England, Rhode Island and national empirical data to**

**make decisions based on facts on what it costs to provide education**

**Funding Formula Includes 3 Key Components:**

- 1) Core Instructional Amount**
- 2) Student Success Factor**
- 3) State Share Ratio**

**(This presentation includes projected FY 2012 funding formula estimates for Bristol-Warren. These figures are subject to change based on final data updates and Governor and legislative approval.)**

**Funding the Basic Education Program:**

**The Core Instructional Amount: FY 2012 = \$8,333/student**

**(Core Instruction Per Pupil will be updated annually)**

**The RI Core Instructional Amount Includes:**

**Teachers**

**Teacher Aides**

**Guidance Counselor**

**Librarian**

**School Administration**

**District Administration**

**Administrative Support**

**Some Portion of Benefits**

**Instructional, Classroom, and School Supplies**

**Textbooks and Equipment**

## **Pupil, Teacher, and Program Supports**

**Some costs will be funded locally, such as retiree benefits, transportation, debt service, and capital projects**

### **Student Success Factor**

**FY 2012 = \$8,333/student**

**(Amount will change annually based on core instruction per pupil updates)**

- Provides additional funding to support student needs beyond the core amount**
  - 40% of Core Instructional Amount applied to PK-12 students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch**
- Based on research and methods used by more than 22 states**
- Builds on the previous work and research done by RIDE and other stakeholders**

### **Bristol-Warren's FY 2012 Projected Calculation**

**(3,453 PK-12 RADM x \$8,333 Core Instructional Amount)**

**+**

**(1,149 PK-12 FRPL x \$3,333 Student Success Factor)**

**=**

**\$32,603,696**

**Foundation Total Prior to State and Local Share Calculation**

**RADM = Resident Average Daily Membership. Counts students based on the district where they reside and gives the district credit for any time that the student is an enrolled member of the district. Charter and state school students are excluded from district totals.**

**FRPL = The actual number of PK-12 students receiving Free and Reduced Price Lunch.**

### **State Share Ratio**

**The state share ratio calculation includes two data components:**

**– Assessed property values adjusted for median family income in proportion to the state average(municipal capacity to pay)**

**&#61656; Data collection and calculations provided by the Office of Municipal Finance**

**– Percentage of PK-6 students eligible for free and reduced price lunch (poverty concentration)**

**&#61656; Data reported by school district**

### **Bristol-Warren State Share Ratio**

**The two factors used in the state share ratio calculation are the same for Bristol-Warren; therefore, the state share ratio would not change regardless of whether the poverty factor is included.**

**Bristol-Warren Combined:**

**Assessed Property Value Adjusted for Median Family Income = 33.1%**

**PK-6 FRPL % = 33.0%**

$$\text{SSR} = \frac{.3312 + .3302}{2} = 33.1\%$$

**When calculated separately, the state share ratios by community are as follows:**

**Bristol Alone = 26.8%**

**Warren Alone = 44.2%**

**State share is less if communities are calculated separately.**

**Bristol-Warren's FY 2012 Projected State Share**

**\$32,603,696**

**Foundation Total**

**X**

**33.1%**

**State Share Ratio**

**=**

**\$10,775,534**

## **Projected State Share Upon Full Transition**

### **Bristol-Warren's FY 2012 Projected \$ Change**

**\$10,775,534**

### **Projected State Share Upon Full Transition**

**\$18,861,141**

### **FY 2011 Enacted Education Aid**

**(includes federal stabilization funds /less group home aid; Group home aid remains a separate aid program outside the funding formula)**

**(\$808,560)/yr**

### **Projected Annual Loss During the Ten Year Transition**

### **Additional Funding for Categorical Programs**

**The formula includes additional funding for the following programs (to be transitioned over a ten year period):**

**&#61607; Regional School District Bonus: Provides 2% of the state's share of the foundation in year 1 and 1% in year 2. This bonus phases out in year 3**

**&#61607; Transportation Fund: Provides funding for non-public out-of-district transportation and 50% of the costs for regional school**

**district transportation**

**&#61607; High-Cost Special Education: Provides funding for special education costs that exceed five times the core foundation amount (total core instruction plus student success factor \$58,330)**

**Projected Year 1 Net Impact Bristol-Warren**

|                                       |                                   |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Projected Year 1 Loss</b>          | <b>(\$808,560)</b>                |
| <b>Regional Bonus</b>                 | <b>\$357,137</b>                  |
| <b>Transportation Categorical</b>     | <b>\$120,482</b>                  |
| <b>High Cost Special Education \$</b> | <b>17,300</b>                     |
| <b>Net Year 1 Impact</b>              | <b>(\$313,641) (approx. 1.6%)</b> |

**Changes in Bristol Warren that Impact State and Local Funding**

- Change in community demographics**
  - Property Value/Student increased 223% since 2000**
  - Median family income increased 44% since 2000**
- Local contribution to education – ranks 30th in state despite having the 13th highest property value per student**
- Regional bonus less than previous formulas**
- Loss of students – approximately 125 over the last five years**

**ANY QUESTIONS? For additional information, visit our website at**

**[www.ride.ri.gov](http://www.ride.ri.gov) (Click on Funding Formula Link on Home Page)**

**Also considered was inappropriate incentives, such as over identifying SPED students. Methods and formulas of 20 other states were analyzed. If calculated separately, each town would receive less than they are now slated for. They wanted to move away from categorical amounts in the budget and felt professional development should be part of the formula and provided to every district.**

**Mrs. Rancourt asked if there will be any bonuses for above average performance which this District has already proven. Ms. Gist said this legislation did not include any kind of such bonuses but she would support such a legislative initiative.**

**Mr. Saviano asked about the net impact on year one and if the categorical items would be funded; the Commissioner responded the budget is not yet complete and it is not known how the funding formula, including the categorical items, will be funded.**

**Mrs. Campbell asked if the amounts could change should the financial condition of Bristol and Warren were to plunge; Ms. Gist said it absolutely would, this being a living document open to adjustments.**

**Mrs. Arsenault talked about an article in the “Pre-K Now Newsletter”**

referencing Rhode Island's plan to fund a public pre-K program for 15 Rhode Island districts over the next ten years at a cost of \$10M. She feels this is discriminatory to the 21 other districts who will not receive this money and is appalled that our loss is to benefit students in 15 other districts.

Mrs. McBride criticized the funding formula as missing a revenue stream and extremely discriminatory; student success does not carry as much weight as poverty; a house worth \$500,000 could be home to five families; there is nothing equitable about a formula that takes \$10M from one community and gives \$6M to another; this treatment is no incentive for other districts to regionalize.

Commissioner Gist said Bristol Warren has been receiving a half a million dollars a year more than other districts in the state for no reason at all. Mrs. McBride argued that money was well spent, unlike in other districts. The Commissioner reiterated she would support performance based funding and work with our legislators.

Mr. O'Dell questioned the computation which was explained by Jason Beck as a quadratic measurement that squares the number first, accentuating the difference between the two numbers, emphasizing the larger; lower property values per child equals a larger number in the formula. Mr. O'Dell asked if the funding formula was generated to satisfy the Race to the Top requirements. Commissioner Gist explained although there was a question in Race to the Top whether

**we distributed money equitably, the funding formula was adopted because many people wanted it and it was the right thing to do, in fact she was shocked to learn when she interviewed for this job that RI did not have a funding formula; it originated with the Board of Regents and the guided principles; it now being legislation, she cannot suggest changes. Mr. O'Dell argued that the Department of Education carries a lot of weight with the legislature. The Commissioner would be happy to take feedback.**

**Mr. Silva also thanked the Commissioner for coming; he questioned how the formula can be clear, transparent and equitable when many people cannot understand it and there are many unknown pieces. The "Student Success Factor" portion of the formula is misleading as it implies compensation for student success. Poverty gets "two bites at the apple" and success gets none; the formula is based on poverty, not education. Although we have poor people in our District, they will not be counted because the Town has done a good job at maintaining property value. The Commissioner reiterated she would be happy to work on a performance based incentive. Mr. Silva state the formula implies that it costs more to educate a child in poverty. The Commissioner contends that it does. Mr. Silva said the formula has many flaws; he implored the Commissioner to make changes to the funding formula to include incentives for communities to succeed. Another missing piece is the categorical component; he asked for assurance that those items will be funded. Commissioner Gist said she was advocate for that. Mr. Silva said our communities**

are expected to provide more funding yet Senate Bill 3050 limits the amount the towns can contribute. The Commissioner will advocate for more flexibility.

Senator Felag said the political reality is this District is going to lose tremendously, the loss will total \$44M, calculating the second year losing 2 times \$800,000 and the 3rd year losing 3 times \$800,000; he asked how the School Committee would be able to cut \$2.4M right away and if the potential changes South Kingstown has proposed to the formula will be consider in order to generate a new equation with differences not as great; cuts will have to be made in the curriculum, we will not remain a high performing district and the students will suffer in the end; it will devastate the District by year 5. The Commissioner said the numbers will change each year and she encouraged the District to look at other high performing districts in the state that are funded at the rate Bristol Warren will be funded.

Mr. Brian Chidester, a teacher at Mt. Hope High School, said it was immediately obvious, the formula was to solve the problems created by regionalization, but we have worked those problems through; he questions how this is a fair funding formula. He agrees that students in poverty need extra support, but how can it be fair when children are getting hurt. Mr. Chidester suggested advocating for tasking companies like G-Tech, who benefit from tax breaks, to step up; he believes no cuts should be made to any district; he resented the Commissioner's inference of the District as "pigs in the trough".

**Commissioner Gist again argued the fact of the matter is Bristol Warren has received \$1/2M a year more than other Districts for no reason when other communities that have grown get nothing.**

**Mr. Kevin Faria, a parent, told the Commission Mt. Hope High School is the “best bang for the buck”, and the funding formula will make us susceptible to privatized and charter schools. Mr. Faria referenced an article in “Rhode Island Monthly” that estimates investors in charter schools could double their investment in seven years. Mayoral academies are one way to create charter schools. With the requirement to meet standards the District could be forced to close down or transfer students to charter schools. The Commissioner said she does not follow this logic, that in order for a charter school to come to our community, there has to be a group of people who believe they can provide a better education; there are 5 charter schools in the state now; RIDE wants to give districts the decision on how to intervene in those schools.**

**The Commission acknowledged this is a major change for Bristol Warren and she again encouraged us to look at other high performing districts.**

**Mr. Timothy Gardiner, Mt. Hope High School teacher and local business man, said education is a business and without enough money to run the business, it’s not going to be effective, at risk students will suffer and the morale of the staff will be affected. The**

**Commissioner responded RIDE assures every community receives the basic education system; they are confident the funding formula will provide every community will have enough money to provide the basic education program.**

**Ms. Nancy Chase, as a parent, said 10 years ago Bristol and Warren had a high number of students in private schools, this is not so any longer; however, the District will lose money for every child that leaves the system; many gains have been made in the past 10 years but that will begin to unravel; this is a community of great diversity.**

**Representative Raymond Gallison spoke saying he is angry and upset about this funding formula which is discriminatory; the Commissioner lobbied to take money away from us and other regional districts and it was given to other districts that may not need it. The regionalization law was enacted for a purpose—this District to set a model. About our per pupil cost being higher, the Commissioner did not consider the causative factors. Commissioner Gist disputed this, saying the comparison is appropriate, the factors for regionalization are taken out of the formula. Representative Gallison challenged the Commissioner's reference to the \$2M fund balance as a rainy day fund saying this is a requirement for our bonding rating; he said the Commissioner has made erroneous and false statements and the formula will decimate this District. The Commissioner said it is a reserve and has no affect on the funding formula whatsoever. The formula was a policy decision on what it**

costs to educate a child in Rhode Island; funding was not being distributed fairly.

Mr. Kevin Dubois, a Bristol resident, cautioned against monetary rewards for successful test scores, this is dangerous; he said the District is doing well because of good teachers; he questioned the setting of such a high threshold for funding beyond the base dollar amount. Commissioner Gist explained that funds are set aside for unusually high instances; right now there is no relief for the especially costly special needs situations; IDEA funding is available; the reason for the absence of weight in the formula for special needs students is that it is problematic; most states are moving away from this. Mr. Dubois stated a number of students requiring special education services are not being identified. Ms. Gist said law requires services for those in need. Mr. Dubois felt the formula did not consider regionalized districts; the combining of two towns does not cut the costs of education in half. The Commissioner said regionalization was not the primary reason Bristol Warren was overfunded; the basic premise used was the cost to educate a child in Rhode Island, and the contribution of the State and the contribution of the communities. Mr. Dubois said every plan needs tweeking and he implored the legislators to pursue some of the factors that may have been overlooked in the rush to get Federal money. The Commissioner argued that the funding formula was not passed before the Race to the Top competition.

**Mr. Labonte asked and was informed by the Commissioner's staff that the formula is based on the actual number of free and reduced lunch students and the reduction amounts are a straight calculation over ten years. He asked if the article about pre-schools that Mrs. Arsenault had made reference to was accurate. The Commissioner said parts of it were correct; although pre-K is a wise investment that the State would like to pursue, her guess is it probably will not be funded. Mr. Labonte asked what the State can do to help the District deal with mandates. Ms. Gist said she has the authority to waive mandates if a district proposes an appropriate plan.**

**Bristol Town Council Member Mary Parella told the Commissioner this is an issue we will never agree on; although the funding formula issue has been around for a long time, she never dreamed Bristol Warren would be in a position of losing money. Poverty data shows our community to be not far from the urban ring; the perception of this community as being wealthy is not accurate; she does not know how the towns will be able to make up the shortfall when their funds are also being cut; this situation is very concerning.**

**Mr. Randy Cloutier would rather make up the \$800,000 per year than try to find the money to send his children to private schools; he believes we need to appeal to the parents if they can sustain more; this is a community effort.**

**Kirsten DiChiappara expressed frustration saying we need to**

**prioritize education in this community and adjust to the reduction in funding in a way that is most fair and doesn't unilaterally cut the arts; she would like an idea of how we are going to proceed and suggested community forums for input on the cuts that will have to be made.**

**Chairman Bento said we have collectively come together, discussing different options with the Town Councils and perhaps forming a Blue Ribbon Panel; he encouraged the public to be involved.**

**Melissa Labonte, a music teacher for the District and parent, said \$808,000 equals approximately 9 teachers; it is conceivable that in year one, the 9 music teachers could be cut; in year two the 9 art teachers could be cut; in year three the food and consumer science department; in year four computers and business; in year five, maybe foreign languages; in year six, sports. She said we are stuck with the formula; parents must speak up and hold people responsible; our children are our future.**

**Cheryl Silva, Warren Town Treasurer, said she pulled her children out of the District. She questioned whether the formula was in direct conflict with the Senate 3050 rule; RI General Law restricts the towns on tax rate raises; would the Department of Education assist us in lobbying the Statehouse.**

**Commissioner Gist responded it is the District's decision how to manage with the State aid; the Department of Education will make**

**themselves available if the District chooses to look at revenue rather than cutting expenditures; she would support additional flexibility around the funding cap.**

**Warren Town Council President, David Frerichs, said the community is very proud of our high performing schools and asked the Commissioner's recommendations on how we can make the cuts and stay high performing. The Commissioner said that is up to the District; she cannot make the recommendations but can provide help in the form of technical assistance.**

**Superintendent Thies thanked those who came to the podium and those who spoke on the concept of working together on this. Mrs. Thies likened the education we provide to a banquet on a table top and the system we have build are the legs that support it; one leg has a crack but we have built efficiencies. Another leg is the community and we all must work together; we have wonderful legislators working on our behalf and we need their support to correct flaws in the funding formula if they are found. Administration will continue to streamline what they do and look at our per pupil expenditure; the teachers' contract must be well-negotiated for the benefit of the children. Mrs. Thies stressed the need to increase our local contribution; the investment by locals will be returned double-fold. The 3050 cap must be looked at; we need to look long term at what the state contributes to education; there needs to be a revenue stream. She and the School Committee need the support of the**

**community in order to continue to support the children of this district and move forward.**

**Mr. Bento questioned the Commissioner's position on funding performance based bonuses, whether through the funding formula or categorical aid. Ms. Gist is not interested in adjusting the funding formula right now but believes we should look at performance.**

**Representative Richard Morrison asked the Commissioner what enumerated quantifiers should be used for measurement, to which the Commissioner responded she does not know. Mr. Morrison pressed the Commissioner for the names of the "other schools" she mentioned several times; Ms. Gist stated Barrington and East Greenwich. Mr. Morrison said regional districts are not the same as those not regionalized. The Commissioner expressed respect for the District's management of funds and commitment to excellence in education; she wishes every district could be brought up to the level of funding we have had in Bristol Warren; many districts have been underfunded for many years; the core instructional amount will be adjusted over time; the method of distribution of funding has been dramatically imperfect.**

**In conclusion, Chairman Bento thanked the Commissioner and her staff for coming to Bristol Warren and the Commissioner for rearranging a 9:00 PM meeting so she could stay; he thanked the legislators, Town Councils, teachers, parents and taxpayers. We**

**must now work with Town Councils, increase local contributions to education, and legislators must fight for the categorical aid. Bristol Warren epitomizes what a regional school district should be; our fiscal responsibility has brought us from a junk bond rating to triple A; we are at 20% co-share for health benefits; we have a top notch administration and teacher pool. We cannot begin to make cuts until after Joint Finance; he asked the entire community to come together to assist the District.**

**ADJOURNMENT – 10:03 PM**

**MOTION: There being no further business to discuss, Mrs. Campbell, seconded by Mrs. Arsenault, motioned to adjourn at 10:03 PM. The motion was unanimously approved.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**William M. O'Dell for**

**Karen A. Lynch, Secretary**

**/c**