

## **SPECIAL MEETING**

**CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2005**

**WESTERN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARY**

**400 PHENIX AVENUE**

**PUBLIC SESSION: 6:00 P.M.**

## **MINUTES**

**A special meeting of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date at Western Hills Middle School with the following members present: Mrs. Greifer, Ms. Iannazzi, Mr. Palumbo, and Mr. Traficante. Mr. Archetto, Mr. Stycos, and Mr. Lupino were absent. Also present were Mrs. Ciarlo, Mr. Scherza, Mr. Balducci, Mr. Votto, Mr. Laliberte, Mrs. Mellion, Mrs. London, Robert Gerardi, and Mr. Flynn. Present for the Cranston delegation to the Rhode Island General Assembly were: Senator Elizabeth Roberts, and Representatives Charlene Lima, James Davey, Peter Palumbo, Robert Jacquard, Carol Mumford, and Stephen Ucci.**

**Mr. Palumbo called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.**

**Mr. Palumbo welcomed everyone to this special meeting. He told the delegation present that he hoped to have a good airing with them of what the School Committee needs and what the delegation felt could**

be done. He hoped they could make some headway together to get something accomplished. Everyone is aware of the financial problems in the State. He indicated that he was more aware of the problem at the city level. Mr. Palumbo asked each person to introduce themselves. Mr. Palumbo turned the meeting over to Superintendent Ciarlo.

Mrs. Ciarlo stated that the committee and administration wanted to give the delegation an opportunity to ask questions of them. They wished to divide the conversation into three parts. The first part would be to discuss where the school department has been to clarify any issues regarding last year's budget and the Caruolo Act; secondly to discuss this year and what they are planning for the coming year; and, thirdly, state and national issues that may have an affect on school issues. She was not indicating that most of these measures would not be good, but the problem is being able to implement them in a meaningful way.

Mrs. Ciarlo asked Mr. Balducci to explain to the delegation what took place with the Caruolo Act and what the district has done as a result of the recommendations that came forth from Judge Proccacini.

Mr. Balducci explained that during the fiscal year 2003-2004, the school department needed \$2.3 million more than the city appropriated, so the School Committee took the appropriate steps to seek those additional funds through the court system. They began

the process in October and received a final decision from Judge Proccacini some time in February 2004. The city hired some external financial experts who analyzed the budget and asked a number of questions of the administrators and then presented a case. Their case was predicated on two main areas within the school department budget at the time which were health and annual order allocations. The annual order allocation is the money given out to each of the schools for their consumable supplies and textbook equipment. The city was of the opinion that school administration had over funded their health obligations by approximately \$2 million. With regard to the supply monies, that amounted to approximately \$1 million. It has been past practice of the school department that the money budgeted in the 2003-2004 budget was actually for the school year the following September. It was a decision made by his predecessor that by the time all of the supplies were ordered for the district, received them all, inventoried them all in and had them delivered to the schools, they would be available for the students and teachers when they returned to school in September. The city took the approach that this was fat within the budget, and they didn't need that \$1 million in last year's budget because it was going to be used for this school year. They were of the opinion that this was an easy \$1 million that could be saved.

**Mr. Balducci went on further to say that with regard to the health area, the city started off by stating that the school department was approximately \$2.7 million over funded in this area. As the case went on, they whittled this figure down to approximately \$2 million, but when the school department finished last year, they ran to the good approximately \$1 million. School administration tried to argue their point that it could be \$2 million, but they were only five months into the fiscal year, and there were seven months to go. The judge didn't buy the school department's argument and went with the city's financial numbers. The decision, come February, was that the school department was not awarded the \$3.2 million. The school department had to take the necessary steps to balance the budget before the last fiscal year ended. They did so and did end the year with a surplus, and the school department is moving forward.**

**Mr. Balducci further reported that part of this was a learning experience for the school department. Administration looked at their budget requests for next year and the areas where they might be challenged again to make sure that they have addressed them. In the area of health, they have taken a different approach to budgeting this area. In this year's budget, they are looking at actual expenditures at a certain point in time, projecting those expenditures forward and adding on top of that a projected rate increase that they are getting from their providers. They took this same approach in creating next year's budget. It is an amount that can fluctuate from year to year, and sometimes it could be less of an approach, but it is an area where**

administration had to rethink the way they budget that area so that someone couldn't come back and state that the school department had over-estimated and there was room for improvement.

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In the area of annual order of supplies, Mr. Balducci explained that the \$1 million was a one-year opportunity for someone to cut out of the school department budget. It changed the cycle by which they budget their supplies. Therefore, the money that was budgeted in this year's budget, the \$1 million, is being used for this school year. The just over \$1 million budgeted in next year's budget is for next school year. Administration has fixed some areas as to how they budgeted for next year's budget so that someone looking at this budget cannot say that things are being done incorrectly. They have positioned themselves for the future.

Mrs. Ciarlo added that the reason administration worked so hard to purchase in one year for the following year is due to the fact that many of the book companies and supply houses raise their prices December 31st. If there is money in the budget, one can avail himself of the opportunity to get a lower price for materials which creates a savings for the school department. In the past, they were able to do that. In addition, they were also ordering when it wasn't a busy time

of year and were getting the supplies and materials in in a timely fashion. Because they were able to pay their bills within fifteen days, they received a 2% discount. Since it is a one-time savings, the school department can't do that again. They have run into problems as a result of this with materials coming in late and not being ready for September. It wasn't something that was improper to do, but the school administration didn't do a good enough job in all of their explanations, herself included, to convince the judge that they weren't trying to pad the budget at all. In fact, the health care budget which was assumed to be padded \$2 million more was a result of the previous year when the school department ran a deficit of approximately \$2.2 million. If one is a reasonable person and knows that he or she was running a deficit, they would try to do something for the budgeting the following year. She can't predict if people are going to be healthy one year versus another year. There is no magic formula for Blue Cross. Blue Cross recently came out with instead of a 15% increase and 11% increase. If Blue Cross is wrong and exceeds 11%, the school department still has to find the money in its budget. There is no reserve for the school department whereas the city, after it dissolved its reserve accounts, created some new accounts for reserves which was prudent on their part to be able to take care of any overages in Blue Cross. However, the opportunity was not afforded to the school department. They do not have the resources in order to do that. They have to pray that everyone has a healthy year not only this year but also next year.

**Mrs. Ciarlo commented to the delegation that she had given each person a packet containing the power point that she used when presenting next year's proposed budget to the School Committee. Mrs. Ciarlo presented this Power Point to everyone present.**

**Mrs. Ciarlo indicated to the delegation that she hoped they would be successful in helping Cranston Public Schools because, unfortunately, costs are rising. In addition, no one knows what will happen with President Bush's cuts because it will have a profound effect on school programs. Mrs. Ciarlo asked Mr. Balducci to explain the**

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**financial portion of the power point. He had updated the figures since the School Committee adopted the budget last evening. Mr. Balducci explained the remaining portion of the power point to the delegation.**

**Mrs. Ciarlo remarked to the delegation that Cranston has a public charter school. They are in partners with the Laborers International. When the school department came on board, they were supposed to have three years of funding. Mrs. Ciarlo asked Mr. Balducci to explain the funding cycle for the charter school.**

**Mr. Balducci stated that Cranston Public Schools partnered with the New England Laborers Association to open up a public charter**

school. The benefit of opening up a public charter school in Cranston's case is that 50% of the per pupil obligation comes from the state, and the school district pays the balance or the remaining 50%. One of the things the district was able to take advantage of when first opening up this charter school was federal dollars. It is a grant referred to as Charter School Implementation and Planning Grant. The district was on cycle to receive three full years' of approximately \$250,000 per year. They were able to receive the \$250,000 for year one and year two. It was used toward increasing the programs offered at the charter school. In creating this year's budget for 2004-2005, they again budgeted \$250,000 as a revenue source that they were going to use to expand the programs at the charter school. In a meeting with representatives from RIDE in January, the school department was informed that the state did not receive their final allocation from the federal government. One of the reasons the state did not receive this funding is due to the fact that Rhode Island was not pro-active on the state level when it came to charter schools. There were certain decisions made by the General Assembly as far as putting caps on the number of charter schools that a municipality could open, and there were some other issues as well. The federal government didn't look too highly on those decisions made at the state level so it had a direct impact on Cranston's charter school because it was a \$250,000 hole that the school department has to make up. He hoped the Cranston delegation could help with some decisions to change things at the state level that would have a benefit to the charter schools state wide.

**Mr. Traficante corrected a statement made by Mr. Balducci in that the school department budgeted \$170,500 the third year and not \$250,000. The Laborers' anniversary is in March, and when they submitted their application for the charter school, they received three quarters of the year rather than a full year. They were told by Keith Oliveira from RIDE that the reason the federal money entitlement did not come down was due to the fact that the General Assembly did not raise the cap on charter schools especially in the municipal areas of Providence, Pawtucket, and Newport. In addition to that, they also received from them a grant for \$290,000 which gave them permission to build an outdoor structure for a hand-on type classroom. They met with Mr. Oliveira who threw another bomb indicating that the \$187,500 was included in the \$290,000. They went out to bid on a building that would cost approximately \$290,000**

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**only to find out that they didn't have \$290,000 but something far less than that. They have had to freeze many accounts which will jeopardize some of their programs. The situation remains that they will not receive further federal entitlements until the General Assembly addresses that issue regarding the cap on charter schools especially in the urban type areas. He was sure this was a concern to the Cranston delegation because the unions are usually not charter friendly. The New England Laborers/Cranston Public Schools'**

**Charter School received a glowing recommendation from Marsha Reeback of the AFT because the Laborers weren't fighting unions; they were a union to begin with and weren't going to bang heads with the teachers' union so they joined forces and became an equal partner. He hoped that the delegation could encourage discussion of the cap to avoid conflict with the unions throughout the state especially the teachers' union.**

**Representative Mumford indicated that in higher education there is something called the Higher Education Price Index which allows tuition fees to go up the CPI plus 1%. She knows that higher education funding is very different from public education. She asked if a similar index existed for elementary and secondary education, and Mr. Balducci stated that he did not know of one existing. Administration looks from one year to the next at its contractual obligations, non-contractual obligations and whether or not the district wants to implement any new programs. This is how the school budget is built from one year to the next.**

**Mrs. Ciarlo added that during the time of the Caruolo action, the judge asked for the definition of what constitutes adequate education, and they had no answer. Each school district should know what constitutes an adequate education financially and educationally. It could include certain programs. Each district should know what each child should be able to do, know and have as a result of this. It should not be stated in a piecemeal fashion. More communities are**

going through the Caruolo action, and adequate education still has not been defined. This is something critical that the Department of Education needs to do. That would be the agency everyone would look to. Last evening the committee voted to hire a part-time auditor who would report directly to the School Committee. This approval in no way discounts all the work that Mr. Balducci does. When the school district went before the judge for the Caruolo action, the city was able to bring in experts, and the school department had their own people who are experts and were said to be biased. This person will help review and verify and will report to the School Committee. There is no other community in the State of Rhode Island that is doing this. This is another way for the district to define that they want to be fiscally responsible and to be able to answer any and all questions, but help in defining adequate education in the State of Rhode Island would be helpful to all communities as well.

Mr. Palumbo referred to the remarks made earlier regarding higher education and he noted that they can accept as many as they want, but Cranston has to accept everyone

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who comes here. In addition to that, if the population is not what the district desires in terms of what has to be provided financially, the district still has to provide them such as special needs, ESL, etc. whereas higher education does not run into these same problems.

**Representative Mumford commented that the index is developed as a guideline for what tuition increases should take effect for a given academic year. Mrs. Ciarlo added that school districts don't know what the state aid will be until some time during the school year. There was a committee that she served on a few years ago that studied state aid to education, and they came up with a report that had a base line that everyone should receive. There was also a percent for those communities that had special education students over the 5% norm and there was another 2% for those communities with special needs populations.**

**Mrs. Ciarlo went on to remark that the district would like some assistance with the federal grants that they receive. Mrs. Ciarlo asked Mr. Laliberte to share with the delegation some of his concerns regarding these grants.**

**Mr. Laliberte stated that originally with the IDEA Grant the federal government was going to reimburse cities and towns up to 40% of the per pupil expenditure. Right now under the President's new budget Congress is currently barely funding 14% of the per pupil cost for special education. Cranston does have a larger number of students coming in that are significantly impaired. As a result of that, many of them receive funding from the Cady Beckett Fund which gives the towns the right to get reimbursed through Medicaid for some of the services they put money out for. The Governor has just announced that he would like to see those parents pay \$125 per month toward**

that Medicaid purchase. When he met with the Special Education Advisory Board Parents, there was a concern expressed that some of the parents may not be able to afford that \$125 per month, and, therefore, they would lose their Medicaid funding. This would also be a concern to the district because many of the services provided are reimbursed through Medicaid. Speech language therapy and occupational therapy are examples of some services reimbursed through Medicaid. The district would lose the money if the children lost their entitlement to Medicaid.

Mr. Laliberte went on to say that the district is also concerned about the grants and the elimination of the Title 2 Grant which is the professional technology development grant. There has also been discussion concerning the elimination of Title 4 funding which is safe and drug free schools. Again, there are many programs that Cranston services including the after school programs and safe and drug free programs within the elementary and middle schools. There is also on the table the possibility of eliminating Title 5 funding which is an innovative grant. The district has been able to train some of its Epic teachers for the Enrichment Program through this funding. The district is also losing at the federal government level 2.1% of vocational educational funding. They are putting an emphasis on higher education. The district wanted to have assessments in grades 3 through 8, and now they are looking at assessing youngsters from grades 3

through 11, and the state does provide the funding for this; but it doesn't show that now the district has to do progress monitoring. As a child goes through school, the district must monitor their progress. That testing is not covered by the state testing funding. The students must also qualify the testing for students who are reading below grade level. If they are, the district must provide certain services for those students, and that testing isn't covered as well. There are some hidden items not seen when the federal government and the state government comes out with mandates.

Secondary reform is also asking that the districts write personal literacy plans. This year it is only for the freshmen students and for the elementary students. Next year it will increase. If a child is getting intensive reading, they have to be taught by a reading consultant. Cranston is fortunate that it already has a reading consultant in each of the buildings. As the number of children grow who need the personal literacy plans, the district will have to increase the number of people who have to be trained to work with these children. The state is also asking the districts to do common planning time, and originally the state law said that at least to begin with the common planning time at the secondary level would be around the most needy kids. It seems that they will require each teacher receive common planning time, and this is a money issue. He asked where this time would be found in the school day. They are

also looking for the elimination of study halls to increase the instructional time. He asked where those students would be placed if they are not in study halls. If the students have to be in front of a teacher, that means increasing personnel. They have developed a new diploma system which is graduation by proficiency. Cranston has put a lot of money into digital portfolio, and it is already at the high schools and is coming to the middle schools. In graduation by proficiency, the students not only have to pass three chosen common exams at the end, they also have to demonstrate their knowledge in some practical form. That may be a project they are doing or through the digital portfolio. The district was under the impression that the state would be requiring only three years of math, and that is why Cranston added the third year of math to their curriculum. The state actually said that they will be requiring four years of math, and the fourth year will be an application of math which could be a business math or accounting where a student is applying the math. The state also said that the districts would need individual learning plans for every student in high school. This district knows the work that goes into writing individual educational plans for students with special needs. Now the ball game would have to take on all the students in the high schools and start writing educational plans. He asked Mrs. Deirdre London to go through some of the pieces that the district would be losing if they lost the funding in Title 2, 4, and 5.

Mrs. London thanked all the representatives for attending this meeting, and she hoped that they could use their influence to help

**Cranston. The rumor is that Title 2 Technology will be zero funded in 05-06, and for Cranston Public Schools that is approximately \$60,000. 20% of that is for professional development of its teachers in**

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**technology grades 1 through 12, and it has also funded several computers one of which is a wireless computer lab at Cranston High School West this year for a cost of \$60,000.**

**The next federal grant that is rumored to be zero funded is Title 4 Safe and Drug Free Schools Grant. This is close to \$110,000 for the schools and has an incredible impact because it funds the COZ staff which is the Child Opportunity Zone personnel. They work with parents in the community and have an incredible community link. A huge impact of losing Title 4 would be the after school buses. Title 4 funds the after school buses in all the middle schools, and it is linked with the 21st Century Program at Bain Middle School and Gladstone School. It would annihilate Cranston's after school program, and the district's dollars are so tight. Safe and Drug Free Schools Grant also funded Project Respect which is a program run through CODAC which is an adolescent behavior control and helps those adolescent students at risk of violence. It funds the comprehensive guidance program Diversity Week at Cranston East and a host of other adventure programs. The basic premise is that if kids are kept busy**

**after school they will be safe and stay away from drugs.**

**The third major grant the district is at risk of losing is Title 5 valued at \$100,000. It is the most flexible grant and has funded computers for Cranston East library. It has funded consultants from the Brown Alliance for the Advisory Program at both high schools. In addition, it has funded math software for the three middle schools this year; library servers, Epic consultants and busing for special education throughout this district. She asked the delegation to please do what they could to influence others.**

**Mrs. Ciarlo noted that if there is any money left over, the district has to spend \$500,000 to get the fire codes up to speed because of the Station Fire. Sometimes the Cranston Public Schools are criticized, and people say to her that the problem is that Cranston is so successful. As long as she is Superintendent and these people are here with her, the district will try to be successful. They will never use the children as pawns to get money. It is not to get money but rather it is about how the money will be used to make better what is done with it. They could use just a little bit more to make it better. Until the state develops some models for success, the district needs help. The comment is always made that the communities will be held accountable. Cranston is held accountable and doing their best. She asked why Cranston is not rewarded along with the other communities that are doing well. The administrators and the School Committee do appreciate when everything is very difficult that the**

**state legislators are doing their very best to help.**

**Senator Roberts stated that one of the challenges is that there is no revenue increasing at the level the way the budget is increasing. The rate that is absolutely necessary is twice or three times the rate of state revenues. She felt that the assembly would be successful with an increase above the Governor's proposal, but she doesn't see anything close to the district's expectations. She knows that they are not looking for any**

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**tax increase. It is a struggle for those of them in education to understand why over the past five to eight years there is an 8% to 10% increase. Her area has declined in school population, and she asked how it could work better**

**Representative Mumford added that she concurred with Senator Roberts. With regard to the charter school, she doesn't believe that the charter school problem will be solved this year as it should be resolved.**

**Representative Davey stated that on Thursday a bi-partisan group will file legislation designed to address some of the problems Cranston is facing which are pension reform, health care, payment reform, expansion of management rights and collective bargaining. For**

example, at the state level, pension issues are not subject to collective bargaining, but they are at the local level. This group thinks that the same consideration should be given to the local people. Take pension matters out of collective bargaining. This is what is called an omnibus bill, and Speaker Murphy will be briefed on it tomorrow. They will be having a press conference on Thursday to announce it. He suggested that there were parts people would like and parts that people will think are too harsh. He hoped that there could be a discussion on these issues rather than an argument. For example, the \$2 million that the district got because of the increase in the pension, he asked RIPEC if they had ever studied the differences in pensions. He said that he would be happy to come to Cranston once the bill has been introduced to discuss the bill after the committee has had a chance to read it. RIPEC did study Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island in terms of pension, and they found that in Rhode Island they are the only one without a minimum retirement age after twenty-eight years of service. In Massachusetts, one has to be sixty-five, and in Connecticut one has to be fifty-five with twenty years. They projected the cost, and in Rhode Island the cost is quite higher than in those other states initially from fifty-five to sixty-five. There has to be some pension reform and some sharing of health care costs. People can't keep asking the taxpayers to pick up that burden. A lifelong Democrat and taxpayer who is 93 years old will be at the State House on Thursday who says that it is not right what is happening. Changes have to be made. He felt that there would be parts that people will like. They will

deal with unfunded mandates to obtain relief on special education, out of districting busing, etc. He hoped that they could have an honest discussion. His motives and goals are to have an open, accountable, and honest government that is responsive to all the taxpayers. He hoped that he is open to discussion. He felt that Rhode Island needed to have this conversation, and there are parts that could be broken off so that it wouldn't be one big bill that has to be swallowed.

Representative Jacquard stated that a lot of these things need to be talked about, but at the same time the dialogue needs also to include explaining to home owners and taxpayers why they need to support their school system. They are biting off their nose to spite their face to think they can just cut a school budget. He truly believes that the value of homes directly is tied to the quality of the schools. People need to discuss this

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issue more. The delegation needs to discuss also why special needs students are bused in the manner in which they are bused. It is a good thing the way special needs students are treated in this day and age. The discussion needs to include why special needs students should be able to go to their neighborhood schools and should not be bused elsewhere or out of their neighborhoods and why there is a need to pay for it even though it is very expensive. Realities have

changed as well. The discussion needs to have both sides. Mr. Davey stated that the discussion should include all sides because there are more than two sides. Mr. Jacquard remarked that there is a whole new population of students who were not around a generation ago. Some of the issues Mr. Davey is raising no one hears any discussion about, and no one hears any discussion about why there are mandates because there are cities and towns who pay for these students. Representative Davey agreed with Representative Jacquard that there should be a total discussion. One of the areas that has bothered him is the apparent excessive special education needs in Rhode Island compared with other states in terms of the percent of students who are special education and the cost involved. He felt there was something out of whack. He doesn't know enough about it to offer any solutions, but it is an area that needs to be looked at. Senator Roberts indicated that she was never directly involved in the funding formula. She commented further that people from her neighborhood appreciate how good the schools in Cranston are, particularly the elementary schools. The accountable message Mrs. Ciarlo referred to earlier is not aimed at Cranston. Cranston looks very impressive when one looks at the other school districts. Cranston has some real issues at the middle school level. She doesn't think any school district in the state deals well with middle schools. She hoped that would change. She agreed with Representative Jacquard that there is a reality problem, and that is they want to do the right thing but where do they get the money to do it. She would love to get rid of the out of state mandate for busing,

but it won't happen in the legislature. Mrs. Ciarlo added that Cranston couldn't get out of Region 3 which is an overburdened region. In addition, if a person declares himself homeless, the parent can choose where they want the children to attend school. There is a student whose family is homeless who lives in North Kingstown but goes to Cranston West. It costs \$900 a month just for transportation back and forth to North Kingstown.

Representative Palumbo indicated that some of the representatives and senators had a meeting yesterday with Congressman Langevin. What concerns Mr. Palumbo are the federal mandates from the No Child Left Behind Act coming down to the states and expanding it to the high schools. The state will be experiencing double-digit deficits over the next five or six years. That is frightening in itself. With regard to special needs, he has two special needs children, and he will disagree with Mr. Davey on that situation because Cranston does an outstanding with these children. His group is going to work to obtain as much money as possible, but it is a small pot, and every year it seems to get smaller and smaller. The delegation will be there again to try to get whatever they can for the district and to use whatever political influence they have.

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Mrs. Ciarlo commented that a school committee has to prepare a budget in January at a time when they don't know where the Mayor

stands and they don't know what the state or the federal governments are going to do. The budget that is presented in January is only a preliminary plan at that time. This year compounding that are all seven unions negotiating new contracts. They don't know how all this will turn out. Many of the things the state wants to do is good, but they should limit what they want to do. Part of Cranston's success is that they stick with it and don't leave it. She is looking for any innovative money for many things they would like to do that she can't take out of the budget. Administration likes the aspiring principal program because they can train prospective principals in house. There are five elementary principals retiring this year with the possibility of another one. That is one-third of the elementary principal staff, and she doesn't know what might be happening at the high school level. If there could be some consistency in the amount, guarantee that , and then try to do beyond that amount for aid. If the delegation could help the district with some opportunities for seed money, it would be appreciated. There was some money from the Permanent School Fund that was used to fund some grants. This district wants to be so accountable that the School Committee voted last night to hire a part-time auditor who would report to the School Committee. This will be someone from the outside who will help the district but at the same time have the independence to be able to report back to the committee. If there is something else this district should be doing, they would be welcome to suggestions. She welcomed the delegation to visit the schools to see what is happening and to see the reality of the students.

**Representative Stephen Ucci stated that he was new to the assembly and represented a small piece of Ward 5. When he campaigned this summer, over and over again he heard how wonderful the Cranston schools are. He reiterated Mr. Jacquard's earlier comment that people do appreciate the schools. One of the things that they have to start looking at is changing the paradigm a little. They have to sensitize people to find savings. He grew up in a family that has worked in government and he has watched the budget process mostly in Johnston. If people find savings and give it back to whatever department it is, they have lost it forever. If they could come up with a plan where people are sensitized that if they come up with a savings, a portion of those funds could be kept, more people would start to do things more efficiently. In a particular line item, people would be more inclined to sand bag it because they know they might have some type of contingency. When he was campaigning, he also heard about parental involvement. When parents are involved in the schools for fund raising, etc., there needs to be a way to sensitize that. He heard a horror story regarding a piece of equipment that was purchased for a school through the PTO only to find out that the department wouldn't pay for the paper for this machine. They have purchased the equipment and have saved the school department from purchasing this asset and didn't support it. This is the wrong message that is being sent. He knows that this can't happen overnight, but people can be made to be more accountable for the cost**

savings aspect. Hopefully, more money can be found internally to grow the success the district already has.

Mr. Palumbo stated that Mrs. Ciarlo is the diplomat; he is not as diplomatic as she or is he as smooth. Everyone knows that Cranston is an A plus system. He believed that everyone got the idea that when the budget is made up it is not hastily done and is very well thought out. Administration and the School Committee have worked very hard to squeeze out every penny. The state makes all the mandates that come down that demand what the districts do. The state then turns around and tells the districts to do it efficiently as possible but they won't give the districts the money. If the districts were as imaginative as some of the state people, this system would collapse, never mind being an A plus system. He could not accept the statement that there was nothing that could be done; there is always something that can be done. It doesn't mean that the assembly can solve every single problem, but there is always something that can be done whether it is working with someone solving it or stopping some of the mandates. These mandates that are coming down are unfunded. The assembly makes a mandate for students to get specialized help with a reading teacher, but the district can't hire the reading teacher because the money is not there.

The districts and the assembly have to work much more closely together. He felt that the price of a home in Cranston is determined to a very large extent on how the schools are run. He can't believe that the people in Cranston cannot afford to have the roofs fixed on schools. He can't believe that they can't afford to have the students inside a school building instead of constantly in one of the portable classrooms on the outside. If the states can't cut back on what the federal government is forcing the school districts to do, they are hurting the students. Cranston has received outstanding grades with respect to testing, etc. He is convinced that the grades would be much higher if the state and committee worked with Mrs. Ciarlo, her teachers and principals instead of taking 80% of their time trying to find the next dollar to do the next thing. The assembly has no idea how much of their time is spent trying to find funds. The state has to do better, and the districts can't accept the answer from the state that there is nothing they can do; cut back or in effect don't pay the teachers. He was not arguing that they would negotiate hard because they will. A school department can't get highly qualified teachers, which is what the federal government is demanding, and pay them nothing. One cannot demand all of this specialized teaching and not give the money for the teacher. It is grossly unfair when these demands are placed on a school system. He knows that the assembly will try to help, but they have got to do better.

With regard to health care, the city has said that the district is estimating too high. The committee told the city that if they were

estimating too high they would lower it, but the city would have to give the school department the difference if it is too high. Everyone has to work together to keep this system going. He doesn't want to see this school department fall back. Everyone sees what is happening in Providence. Cranston is not the same community; the population is a little different. Cranston's Title 1 schools are

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no different than those in Providence but Cranston's schools are high performing and it is because the Superintendent in Cranston knows how to plan with her staff of five people and the teachers to do the job correctly. At least help this district.

Mr. Davey commented that it would be helpful to him if the administration could list the unfunded mandates that are troublesome for the district. The assembly could then see if there was something they could do about them. He noted that his wife is an educator, and he has a Little Brother in Cranston. There is nothing further from his mind than to hurt the people who are doing an outstanding job. Nonetheless, the assembly has to take a look at where money can be saved at the local level, especially when the districts know they will not get it from the state and the federal government.

Mrs. Ciarlo remarked that there are six people, herself included, that are central administration. She knows that the next person coming in

to serve as superintendent would want a deputy superintendent. This person is also the executive director for all non-certified operations. In another district, there would be a business manager and then someone who would be either assistant superintendent for all non-certified or management areas. To run all special education, regular education, professional development, the district has Mr. Laliberte and Mr. Scaffardi. If they were to leave, there would be two more positions added. The district has a director of plant who also is the transportation director. If he retires, the district will have someone in each job. The Stadium School principal is also the director of library services so that would be another position. That would total eight positions which would amount to \$700,000. She has encouraged people to find ways to save money and operate more efficiently. If the assembly sees that there are some innovative programs, this district will always be willing to listen. At the middle school level, these students are too young for high school and too old for elementary school. They have not been treated as middle school students; they are an element unto themselves. She wants seed money no matter how much it is. She congratulated Mr. Flynn, President of the Cranston Teachers' Alliance, and his teachers. Without the teachers, there is no school system. They have contributed greatly to the success of this school system. She will retire from the Teachers' Retirement System; she is a teacher too. She told the assembly delegation that if they wish to have any discussion, please let her know. Mrs. Ciarlo thanked them for coming to share their ideas.

**Mr. Ucci stated that he is on the House HEW Committee. There is a bill before them to require students who are between three to six years of age to have their eyes tested either by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist. The results have to be given to the schools for them to hold on to, and the Health Department will track them. That means more administrative costs and more clerical help. Mr. Ucci asked where the money would come from to support this, and he was told that the schools would absorb the cost through their clerical help. This is another classical example of another unfunded mandate. He will not vote for that bill because it is another unfunded mandate. The**

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**districts have to impress upon all the delegation that these things creep in, and it may sound like a great idea, but the districts need someone watching the proposed legislation. He will be one voice stating that this is just another unfunded mandate that the taxpayers ultimately pay for.**

**Mrs. Ciarlo asked the delegation to ask RIDE to define what adequate education means.**

**Mr. Traficante felt that the General Assembly over the years has forgotten what their responsibility is. Education is a state**

responsibility, and that message has gotten lost. When Mr. DiPrete came into office, he said his goal was 60%-40%, 60% state and 40% local. The General Assembly was on board, and it was being increased each year so that the municipalities could have a quality school system. Mr. Traficante asked why it has reversed itself. Mr. Ucci responded that in the six weeks he has been at the General Assembly, there has been no one there lobbying on behalf of education. The optometrist bill is an example. There were people there from Blue Cross but no one from education to state what the impact would be. Educators need to be more vigilant in this respect.

Mrs. Mumford commented that this is her seventh year at the General Assembly, and Human Services is taken care of beautifully. However, there is no money left for anything else. She would like to fix it, but it is a big task. Because of the devotion to human services, there is no money left. Mr. Traficante responded that he may not see it in his life time, but it will come down to a city/state regionalization.

There being no further business to come before this meeting, it was adjourned at  
8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

**Anthony J. Lupino**

**Clerk**