

CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2006

WILLIAM A. BRIGGS BUILDING (REED CONFERENCE ROOM)

845 PARK AVENUE

PUBLIC WORK SESSION: 6:00 P.M.

MINUTES

A public work session of the Cranston School Committee was held on the evening of the above date in the William A. Briggs Building Reed Conference Room with the following members present: Mrs. Greifer, Ms. Iannazzi (arrived at 7:15 p.m.), Mr. Lupino, Mr. Palumbo (arrived at 6:13 p.m.), and Mr. Stycos. Mr. Archetto and Mr. Traficante were absent with cause. Also attending were Mr. Scherza, Mr. Nero, Mr. Balducci, and Mr. Votto.

The work session was called to order at 6:06 p.m.

The roll was taken.

Mr. Lupino welcomed Mr. Michael Napolitano to the Work Session. He was invited to view the EdNets presentation along with Councilman Fung and Councilwoman Fogarty as mayoral candidates

in the City of Cranston. He noted that Ms. Donna Tocco-Greenaway was present as well.

I. EdNets Presentation

Mr. Richard Trembowicz, representing EdNets, stated that this company was relatively new. He explained that this system has been introduced in several communities in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. He expected that North Providence and Smithfield will be joining shortly. He further commented that Cranston has a diverse population to communicate with. They work with different companies in a large audience who want to give back. It is a pay for performance opportunity. They are getting a tremendous response to this program. Mr. Trembowicz demonstrated to the committee how this program works for a school district. Because of the time constraint, Mr. Lupino asked the committee members to e-mail their questions to the School Committee secretary who in turn will e-mail them to Mr. Trembowicz. He added that Ms. Donna-Marie Frappier, Network Supervisor for the district, has been set up on the training site so that a committee member can see how it works.

Mr. Trembowicz explained that this district is large with many websites that don't talk to one another. They can take one piece of information and publish it throughout the district. Mr. Scherza explained that the executive staff had a very short in-service on this program. Mr. Trembowicz explained that they are continuously

expanding to their platform. The high school curriculum activities and sports are in the development stages. They are fully templated models. If they can get one parent to work once a week with their child they would be much more engaged in the process.

Page 2 September 13, 2006

Mr. Lupino asked that with regard to the financial assumptions if there was any upfront cost to the district other than the staff to implement the program. In addition, he asked if there was a minimum that he anticipated or expected. In response, Mr. Trembowicz indicated that EdNets does a three-year contract with a district. He noted that they already know the consumer spending in the district. The challenge is to get parents motivated in the program to have them use it. They are presently conducting parents' nights in the various districts. They also register them for the program at that time. Mr. Trembowicz distributed to the committee a financial assumptions statement for Cranston Public Schools. A copy is attached for the record.

Mayoral candidate Michael Napolitano asked what the break-even point is for this company to generate a profit, and Mr. Trembowicz indicated that it would be 1/6 of the membership targeted. Mr. Napolitano asked how much one would have to spend on average in order for to the district to net 50% profit. Mr. Trembowicz responded that it is approximately \$3,000 a year. A typical family spends about

\$7,000 per year on food. Mr. Napolitano noted that it is based on basic necessities.

Mr. Lupino reiterated his earlier comment that the committee could communicate through e-mail with the School Committee secretary.

II. Cranston High School East NEASC Report

Mrs. Greifer stated that ordinarily the School Committee doesn't allow public comment. She requested that questions be permitted from the public on the subject of the Cranston East NEASC Report. Mr. Lupino commented that he would allow questions from the public at the end of the meeting if the committee stayed on track.

Mr. Sean Kelly, Principal of Cranston High School East, and Ms. Jeanine Nota, Assistant Principal for Academic Affairs, presented the Cranston High School East report to the committee. Mr. Kelly distributed to the committee a copy of the Overview of Findings to the committee and commented on certain sections of those findings. He noted that the report is very positive in terms of instruction and of what goes on on a day-to-day basis. The school did take some heat on the school's facilities. There was a lengthy discussion regarding each of the areas highlighted by Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Nero commented that the school and administration live this report. This is not the same report from ten years ago. At that time,

the school failed on nine standards. If the school fails 2-1/2 standards, they have the risk of failing again.

Mr. Lupino turned the Chair over to Mr. Palumbo.

Mr. Lupino left the meeting at 7:08 p.m.

Mr. Kelly noted that some of the recommendations from 1951 are still appearing in the current document. Mr. Scherza commented that Mr. Kelly and Ms. Nota have pointed out a number of pieces

Page 3 September 13, 2006

that have been in place for a number of years. With regard to NEASC's comments about the cleanliness of certain areas of the building, he cautioned the committee against blaming the custodians for parts of the building that are dirty because it is an area that has been cut year after year.

III. Program Tracking at the High Schools

Mr. Norman Laliberte, Mrs. Judith Lundsten, and Mrs. Jean Campbell presented to the committee a Power Point presentation on High School Restructuring – Rhode Island High School Diploma System. A

copy of the Power Point is attached for the record. It is also available on the Cranston Public Schools Website at www.cpsed.net. The committee had received previously a packet of materials regarding the programs of study at both high schools. Mr. Laliberte noted that changes were being brought about by the No Child Left Behind Act. The purpose of this presentation was to provide the committee with some background on the changes made to date.

Mrs. Lundsten noted that *Breaking Ranks* is the current document being used for middle and high school reform. It gives all recommendations and presents that it should start at the middle school and carry through to the high school. Mr. Palumbo asked how students get into honors classes, and Mr. Nero responded that it is done on the recommendation of teachers and parents.

With regard to high school reform, a parent asked how all of this would be accomplished. She asked if it would be done through work sessions, faculty meetings, or training. Additionally, she asked what support would be present to make sure that this happens. It could be a teacher who is already accomplishing these things or it can be someone who excels in it to help other people to do it. Mr. Laliberte responded that administration is looking at a grant in the areas of math and science that could, if the district is successful in bringing in the grant, bring in between \$200,000 and \$800,000 a year for the next three years to train high school teachers particularly in the areas of science and math. English/language arts are also involved in this

grant as well as guidance to help them boost their skills in the area of instructional strategies. The high school teachers have the content down very clearly. It is the strategies used when a teacher has a heterogeneous group in front of him. They have to develop how they can meet the needs of the high level student as well as the child who is in the middle. That is one of the things that would be tackled by such a grant. The district has also been providing teachers with ongoing professional development in that area. Mr. Nero added that Cranston has been an IFL district for approximately six years, and Cranston has been involved with the Institute for Learning where nine principals have been involved. The teachers at Western Hills have been very involved and trained over the past five years. The teachers have a firm base as they move forward with requirements for high school graduation.

Mrs. Campbell pointed out that Mr. Stycos had asked the question about the Program of Studies. When one looks at the Program of Studies, one will see the grade span expectations actually listed. One of the things the high school diploma now indicates is that a student has met a certain level of proficiency, and that is reinforced through the NECAP Exams. A student will now be able to

Page 4 September 13, 2006

demonstrate that he or she is proficient by passing those NECAP exams, and as parents, they will know all the GSE's that are

addressed through that particular curriculum because it is listed in the program of studies. Mr. Scherza noted that NECAP stands for New England Common Assessment Program, and these exams are given throughout the New England states. Mr. Nero added that these exams are given every year for grades 3 through 8.

Mrs. Greifer commented that one area of concern among parents is applying to college. She asked how Stanford University knows what the rigor of Cranston's programs is. Mr. Scherza responded that NEASC certifies the quality of the programs, and this is the importance of getting certification. He worked at Harvard University in Admissions, and they look largely to the NEASC Report. Mr. Nero added that page 43 of the NEASC Report is pretty clear about this. In the past few months, Providence College has dropped the SAT requirements, and Harvard University stopped their practice of early acceptance because they see it as not being fair to all students, and especially those of ethnicity. The things that the district is discussing doing now, nine years ago he saw it happening at other schools while attending a NEASC convention. Other schools have done it and survived it. The district is moving in this direction and must move in this direction. Mr. Laliberte added that Stevenson High School outside of Chicago has a very similar appearance to the Cranston school system. They have had it in place awhile, and they went from 38% to 40% of their students meeting the standard to 92% of their students meeting the standard. They have raised the bar for everyone, and the students know that they have to reach that bar in

order to graduate and get an endorsed diploma. It is not that they made huge changes in this particular high school. It may be something as simple as taking the study hall and dividing it up where they gave extra help to those students in order to get them through. Cranston has integrated math 1, 2, and 3, and over the three years, the students will get the math they need to meet the standard. That is not the same as a student who is taking Algebra 1 and 2 and Geometry; that is much more rigorous. Cranston's goal is to get every student to the standard.

Mrs. Campbell noted that with regard to the transcript a student who would be applying to a Harvard, a Colgate, or a Stanford will still have 9th grade honors, 12th grade honors, or AP. Mrs. Greifer stated that she was more concerned about the students who are just under the AP Honors. Mrs. Greifer asked that if the district is going to increase the rigor for all children what about the children who would like to have a diploma but if the rigor is increased enough they will become discouraged and do something else or drop out. Mr. Laliberte responded that this is a fear the student will have to live with. If the school gives them a curriculum they will enjoy and that they are able to handle, as long as that program is rigorous and has a logical sequence that will produce a post graduate level for that student so that they can go on to a technical facility, that is what everyone is hoping for; because it is not enough anymore to have the high school diploma. Most people will need at least two years beyond high school, and before long it will be a college diploma that will be

required.

Mrs. Greifer stated that she is concerned about the budgetary cuts the committee has made this year. She asked how the district could discuss extra classes for those students in need of them. Mr. Laliberte responded that when administration discussed the elimination of study halls, they didn't have to create more classes in order to produce it. There are teachers who were supervising those

Page 5 September 13, 2006

studies. Administration had to become creative in scheduling the teachers around that. Those students can be covered who need help.

The honors students who need their service credits can be paired up with a student who needs help in math, and it is a perfect combination. That is enough to spur that youngster on. That didn't cost any money, but what it did do is have creative scheduling.

Mr. Stycos asked about the college preparatory student who is going to some college but not one of the elite colleges. He has heard the fear that if a student took English 9, 10, or 11 and that student will go to a four-year college and because that class is not real tough the child will not do well. The college will say that Cranston East is not tough enough, and they will not accept students from East. Mr. Scherza responded that there still will be a college preparatory level. Everyone knows that the college preparatory courses prepare

students to go to college. A comprehensive course prepares a student for nothing. That is part of what is driving the district to eliminate the level where there are no high expectations. It is raising the bar and not getting rid of it. There is no logical reason why a college admission officer should look down on an English 10 or 11. All the students would be at the college preparatory or above level.

It was moved by Mrs. Greifer, seconded by Mr. Stycos and unanimously carried that the work session be adjourned.

There being no further business to come before the work session, it was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

**Anthony J. Lupino
Clerk**