

CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE PUBLIC WORK SESSION

MARCH 12, 2014

WILLIAM A. BRIGGS BUILDING (REED CONFERENCE ROOM)

845 PARK AVENUE, CRANSTON, RI

EXECUTIVE SESSION 6:00 P.M.

**PUBLIC WORK SESSION IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE
SESSION**

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MINUTES

This School Committee meeting was held on the evening of the above date in the Reed conference room of the William A. Briggs Building with the following members present: Chairperson Iannazzi, Mrs. McFarland, Mr. Traficante, Mr. Colford, Mr. Gale, Mrs. Culhane and Mrs. Ruggieri. Attorney Cascione was absent from executive session.

This meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. It was moved by Mr. Colford and seconded by Mr. Gale to convene to Executive Session pursuant to RI State Laws -

1. Call to order- 6:00 p.m. Convene to Executive Session pursuant to RI State Laws

2. PL 42-46-5(a)(1) Personnel:

A. Sanders Program

B. Discussion of Non-certified Employee A

3. PL 42-46-5(a)(2) Collective Bargaining:

A. Contract Negotiations' Update(s)=

B. (Secretaries)

C. (Teachers)

D. (Teacher Assistants)

E. (Bus Drivers, Mechanics)

F. (Tradespeople)

G. (Custodians)

4. PL 42-46-5(3)

A. District Safety Plan

B. Discussion of Buildings Report

Call to Order at 7:32 p.m. – Public Session

The roll was called; there was a Quorum present.

Executive Session Minutes Sealed – Ms. Iannazzi stated - no votes were taken in Executive Session. Moved by Mrs. Culhane; seconded by Mrs. McFarland. The roll was called; all were in favor.

Public Work Session

Ms. Iannazzi stated - that we are going to take things a little out of order. We will start with D – Update on Bond – Dr. Judith Lundsten and Raymond Votto.

Mr. Votto asked if anyone have any questions of me?

Dr. Lundsten stated - we will be meeting with the School Buildings Committee also. They are aware of this. It has come to our attention we were required by RIDE to have a principal on the School Buildings Committee, so I gave Mrs. Cole the opportunity to serve on that.

Mrs. Culhane asked if there was a Council representative that sits on that. Dr. Lundsten stated that it was Mario Aceto.

Ms. Iannazzi asked if there were any other issues or discussions about the bonds to which was responded with a no. She further stated to go back to the top of the agenda.

NECAP Scores

Dr. Lundsten stated - so as you all may be aware, last Friday our NECAP scores went home with grades K-8 and 11 and usually we like to bring you up to date with how we work with the NECAP scores.

Mrs. DeRiso is here and she is going to give us a brief presentation and if you have any questions regarding those. We also have the writing scores for grades 5-8.

Sue DeRiso spoke on the NECAP Scores (See handout “A”, “B” and “C” on file with the Superintendent’s Office).

Mrs. DeRiso stated that the report that you all have contains a lot of information, but the overall summary does not tell the whole story. If

you look at the back page, it looks like we leveled out a little bit, but that is not the truth. When I look deeper into the scores, I see some things that we should be really proud of. In fact, the elementary scores are well above the State proficiency average by about 7.2 points and in mathematics we are also above the State average by about 3.2 percent. Our middle school students also scored well above the state proficiency average in reading by about 10 percent. In mathematics, they came above the state average by about 5 percent. The elementary school writing scores have increased this year by about 6 points. Unfortunately, that decreased in the middle school by 8 points, but keep in mind that is still out performing on the State level. The elementary students scored 10 points higher than the State average. Our High School students have outperformed our previous reading tests by 3 points and are 4 points above the state average. While the mathematic scores have shown a slight improvement, we know that needs to be a continued focus area in the future. This year we are above average. This is commendable. If you look a little deeper into the report you will notice that on the first page that indicates all the elementary schools; there are 4-5 elementary individual schools that have 80 percent or more of their students scoring at proficiency. You also have 18 that are on or at proficiency. If you flip forward to the writing scores which are on the top page, you now have 5 schools that are at or above 80 percent proficiency in writing. If you continue to flip forward to the very last page of the report, I think you will notice that Cranston East went from 39 percent proficient to 71 percent proficient. Cranston West

went from 49 percent proficient 64 percent proficient and the Charter school went from 17 percent proficient to 41 percent proficient. This is absolutely unbelievable. These scores are very important to us because we are in transition to a brand new assessment system called PARCC. It requires students to use evidence based writing. With these results, we might have a smooth transition to this writing assessment.

Mrs. DeRiso stated that she would like to share something...a little cheer from one of the parents. Principal Marlene Gamba stated that we have been working so hard and I got some good news and want to share it from one of the parents. The parent stated... "I looked at your scores and compared to all the schools in Cranston and in other demographics, Cranston has pulled in well above other large cities and someone should make a big deal out of it."

Mrs. McFarland stated - I would ask that you send that to the Commissioner of Education. It is wonderful that someone from the community recognizes that.

Mrs. McFarland wanted to know what will be done with the schools that need improvement?

Mrs. DeRiso stated that last year Deb Mellion did an amazing job in getting the Elementary reading program called Faces of Aces. It is used in various constructive ways, citing evidence and recording it. I feel that because of that, they responded positively. I would like to see that to be used more effectively and efficiently. That would be my recommendation. The other would be to continue some of the wonderful things that Jeff Goldthwait is doing with mathematics. We

have some new, great and exciting programs going on in mathematics that hopefully can be carried out into some of the other schools as well. If you look at what is out there and we have learned from some of those programs, it is streamlined. In addition to that, they are doing a wonderful job, the teachers, as well as principals; continue to use the STAR data report. Math is a focus for the entire district. It is not focused on one particular school.

Mrs. McFarland stated - May I ask a question? When will we be implementing that? Would we do some form of Professional Development over the summer - when would that happen?

Mrs. DeRiso stated - I am merely filling in for Deb Mellion. I will certainly make these suggestions to her and hopefully she will carry them out, but I can tell you that some of this, a lot of this is in the elementary schools and are being used in those classrooms. It is indicative of those scores. I have heard from the Charter school who told me that writing was a very serious focus for them.

Mrs. McFarland stated - I see it and I am excited about what I am seeing. I am asking that those schools that seem to have some challenges, what could we do there? Maybe there are reading consultants. Those people need to go to those other schools to help move those other schools along. That is kind of what I am focusing on. I think this is tremendous. I am on the Board for the Charter school and I think it is incredible what has occurred and I am very excited. I am excited overall for our schools, but those schools that are still seeing numbers in the 60's instead of the higher 70's and 80's....what do we do to get them there?

Dr. Lundsten stated - Paula, so you know there is an emphasis on the District Strategic Plan. We are now moving onto the School Improvement plan and a new format. We have to look at the data, not only NECAP but STAR and all kinds of data and come back once that plan is in place and look at the first half of it in cyclical because the plan is going to be reviewed by the Executive team. So if we see a school that is not performing, then where is the data and what are you going to do? If you would like a presentation in another work session, I would be happy to do that.

Mrs. McFarland stated - I just wanted to know what we are doing. I just think that if we are so successful here and it is so exciting then what are we doing at those schools that we could mirror at those schools that are challenged. Obviously, if we gave them a little boost they would probably be up there as well.

Dr. Lundsten stated - thank you. Can we move on to Attendance?

Attendance-Dr. Rosemary Burns

Dr. Lundstren stated - We know that we need our kids in school so we can reach them. We are looking at absenteeism and chronic absenteeism and it's a frightening issue. We also feel knowing from research that if you go deeper on items such as attendance we will have leverage across the board on many other things that we need to get done. So what I would like to do is have an attendance campaign and Dr. Burns is going to present what we have in mind for this and I would like have your approval so we can move forward on this.

Dr. Rosemary Burns spoke on the attendance. (See handout "D" on

file in the Superintendent's Office) I would like to follow-up on what you are saying in terms of this. One of the things that I know is that we really need for this to be district wide what the issues are, the leverage and how sometimes they can double cross. That is sort of part of what the problem. I would like to focus on 5 areas

- Focus on Attendance and Absenteeism
- Alignment to our Strategic Plan
- The make-up of the Task Force
- The purpose and expectations of the Task Force
- Expected outcomes over time (short term and long term)

Mrs. McFarland stated - especially when the chronic absenteeism started at Grade 1 and attendance levels in Grades 5 & 6 and if I asked you what schools they were, there might be some correlation going on there.

Dr. Burns stated - it is interesting and not surprising at all where we have our greatest levels of chronic absenteeism in areas of poverty. It is indicative across the nation.

So the focus of this attendance task force is to really pull together and think about how we go forward. We also know we need to bring everyone together across the city because this is not a situation that teachers by themselves can take care of. We hear from our teachers all the time we could go so much farther if we just had them there. So our focus is in five areas and my goal for this meeting is to inform you of the five areas. First, my focus is on attendance and chronic absenteeism. There are so many leverage points that support improving attendance. We are going to focus on the Attendance Task

Force also because it is aligned with what we are doing. Again, the way we test will determine the outline. The makeup of the Task Force will be the members of the community that are leaders. Not only are we looking at membership that includes internal folks, the executive board and from the school, but also folks that interact with our students people from COZ, the Y and then the Mayor next door. We need to take advantage of ways that these folks can participate. Also, it is a good opportunity for them as well.

The purpose and expectation of this Task Force is for them to commit for at least one year. Each member is going to have to roll up their sleeves in some way or another. So there will likely be sub-committees that will work on various projects. They will provide direct supports and ultimately develop a strategic plan and finally, the expectations that will happen as a result. So we are going to be looking for measurable outcome. This is not only in terms of attendance is improving but that the level of parent involvement.

Dr. Lundsten stated - If you are agreeable, we would like to move forward on this. I would love to have a school committee member on this. I think that is an important piece.

Mrs. Culhane stated - I have one question or concern. We hear a lot today about Task Force, work groups, etc. Unfortunately, they are devoid of the people that actually have their feet on the ground doing the work. So I think to have a task force like this without parental involvement, we really need to have that represented. I see CEAB and SEAC, but I just want to make sure that even though we are talking about other entities as well to give glamour to it, but I think

that parental piece is the most important part, because they are the ones that are getting them to school or allowing them to stay home.

Dr. Lundsten stated - I second this issue. I already have volunteers from the PTO leadership.

Mrs. Culhane stated - I just want to make sure that there is a big emphasis on this. I see that you have this, but I know that sometimes groups are formed and people don't step forward and they say "Well no one stepped forward" and we have to go out and find some.

Mr. Gale stated - that he would volunteer.

Mrs. McFarland stated - is an interesting topic and would be more than willing to volunteer as well, but I think the importance here is not just including students here, but making them part of the process and a part of the Task Force. It is very interesting to see sometimes that our High School students could really impact the lower grades. They could be role models, mentors and kids can see them as something they can achieve to, if they follow what the older kids are telling them to do. I really think they need to be more than just a voice; they need to be equally sitting at the table with us and part of that process.

Mrs. Ruggieri stated - that we have talked about a couple different areas, but I think the fact that we have one truancy officer that is part time for the entire department is a problem. The job itself is not only necessarily involved in finding students that are not in school there are other facets to the job that I think we need to look at and look at how that job is done and how we want it to be done and what we are looking for.

Mr. Traficante stated - who pays for this?

Ms. Iannazzi stated - we do. We pay the salary of one truancy officer.

Mrs. Ruggieri stated - I just think we need to look at that as well.

Ms. Iannazzi stated - other districts outside of ours invest a lot more as well. Providence is substantially larger than us, but they have an entire office that consists of numerous officers and directors that oversee them.

Mrs. Ruggieri stated - I just said that if we are going to really look at the problem that we know it is, we have heard it from our middle school principals and from others and that our numbers are not good.

I am just looking at it from the long term. Once they get to High School, it is too far gone by then and it goes so far back that at that point you can't blame the child.

Mrs. McFarland stated - seeing the economics of our city and State right now, obviously parents are in poverty right now, they are unemployed. We are going to be releasing our survey from Community Action that we did, a state-wide survey and its going to paint a picture, not only focused on poverty but we sent out random surveys to just the general public around the state and middle class families are facing the same issues that people in poverty are facing. Think about it, when you don't have a job that brings home enough to support your family, it intensifies and it affects the children at the Elementary level, so it is an issue that is being faced throughout the state.

Mrs. Culhane stated - to Paula's point too on the Elementary level, I know parents who are not in poverty who don't think twice about saying "Oh, I think we are going to go on vacation" and take their

kids out of school or “he/she needed a mental health day” . We also have this issue of coddling kids that we need to get over. I think that goes more on the opposite end of the spectrum of poverty, but I hear that all the time. I think that is one issue, but I think we need to get parents to wrap their brains around the point that whether your kid is in 1st grade or 12th grade, they need to be in school to learn.

Mrs. Ruggieri stated - another part of this is that there are physicians and pediatricians who are contributing to this in a drastic way. I don't know how we could get anyone from the medical community to help. I am sure they will say “School lady, go away”, but when you have 30-40 days of excused absence covered under “doctors notes”. Again, we need a whole office dedicated to chasing notes, chasing doctors and calling up doctors saying “Hey Dr. Smith, did you know your notes covered 52 days this year?” Of course, they do not know the other side. I can't believe that school personnel does not get to the point and say “why didn't the principal call and find out.” I absolutely think the health community needs to be on there.

Dr. Burns stated - absolutely, the health community needs to be on there.

Mrs. Ruggieri stated - there needs to be a Task Force that focuses on that directly.

Dr. Lundsten stated - Dr. Burns has run numerous amounts of data for us and we noticed some very startling things. Our ELA students had the best attendance. It was an “Ah ha” moment. It also showed that Thursday was a day of high absenteeism.

Mrs. Culhane stated - can I ask a question and I am not trying to

politicize this, however, if we wanted to make this about the students and what is best for the schools, is there a reason why you are so intent on having a representative from the city side on this?

Dr. Burns stated - I have looked at other cities that have done this and that worked.

Mrs. Culhane stated - that may have been in cities that had good partnerships?

Ms. Iannazzi stated - that they may have been school boards that are appointed by the city.

Dr. Burns stated - we looked at Baltimore, Los Angeles, Miami.....

Mrs. Ruggieri stated - I am not saying specifically the Mayor, but maybe someone from his office. The ultimate goal is to say to these people "School is important and here is why." This community person, we might be able to use them to get this message out. I am not necessarily saying have the Mayor come down and say "I am for education and I want you to go to school", but looking at it from a different point of view, if we could get this person who is a constituent liaison to be a part of this.

Mrs. McFarland stated - Another thing we should look at is how younger kids gravitate to someone who is in public safety, juvenile hearing board, and judges, someone that they can gravitate towards that they see as an authority figure that will have consequences for them. So maybe we should look at someone, an authority figure.

Dr. Lundsten stated - maybe someone from library services?

Mrs. McFarland stated - our city library, they are a separate board. That is a good point. You might want to ask them because they are

separate.

Mrs. Culhane suggested maybe using one of local celebrities, like Marissa Castelli or Olivia Culpo. She further stated that she just didn't want anyone using this as a political platform. It is really important to not get entangled in that.

Mrs. McFarland stated - She thinks this is really important to keep kids in school and if her help is needed, she is more than willing to volunteer her time. I have so many concerns when I walk into the schools and see kids being dropped off late or falling asleep in class because they need a nap when they should be getting ready to be educated.

Mrs. Culhane stated - how about most of the guys that I see as a discharge planner at the prison who have not gotten a GED or finished school. Most of them didn't even graduate from high school.

Mrs. McFarland stated - that the survey she mentioned before states that 54 percent of our population has no more than a high school diploma.

Mr. Traficante stated - that absenteeism is just the start. It is an indicator that leads to drop out rates and suspension rates. It is very important that we get these indicators up.

Dr. Lundsten stated - we brought it up at our quarterly meeting that is there a correlation with teacher absenteeism and student absenteeism.

Mrs. Ruggieri stated - if parents know ahead of time that a teacher is going to be out, they are going to keep their children home.

Especially when they know there is a sub and it is going to be a movie day.

Mrs. McFarland stated - that these kids have so much thrown at them that we didn't have. We didn't have social media, kids didn't go to elementary school with cell phones or pagers. It is a whole different society popping up today.

Sanders Program – Michele Simpson

Dr. Lundsten asked if there were any questions of Michele Simpson regarding the Sanders Program.

Mrs. McFarland stated - that we need to do a little bit more research. Pretty much the numbers come down to a wash, but we need to look at the facility, other costs associated with this. Also, if the Collaborative came in would they be using out facility?

Dr. Lundsten stated - that they would be going to the Warwick facility.

Mr. Colford stated - that it will be a challenge finding the talent that we need to do this. Also how would they get there?

Mrs. McFarland stated - that we do not add the transportation costs into our costs, that is an in house costs.

Mr. Joe Rotz stated if you want to run this program, you have to

people that are dual certified and certified in those particular subjects. Look at grades 7-12, you have 4 teachers in that program teaching 7-12 in all content areas. If you look at the regulations and you hired teachers to teach core content subjects, that is a lot of money you will have to add to that program.

Mrs. McFarland stated - what do we do right now that we are not meeting regulations? How long has that been going on?

Dr. Lundsten stated - this just happened, by September we have to meet regulations.

Mr. Colford stated - It may look like a wash, but if we were to get up to regulations, our costs are going to go through the roof.

Mrs. McFarland stated - so they didn't give us any funding?

Mrs. Culhane stated - no. Even if we had the money there are not enough of these teachers available out there.

Capital Budget and 2014-2019 Capital Budget and Improvement Plan

Dr. Lundsten stated - that with regards to the Capital Budget and Capital Budget with Improvement Plan. Based on the authority going out to the two bonds, what we need to do now is amend these two and change the projects and time-line out. If you are agreeable with

that, we can work on that and get it back out to you. I have to also notify the City Council and explain why this is occurring.

Ms. Iannazzi stated - yes.

Mr. Traficante stated - I have said this dozens of times, I think we should have in our Capital Budget each and every year, a portion of the R&R money, approximately \$250,000 each year should be in that R&R fund, because we do not have enough Asset Protection money in our Operating Budget.

Mr. Balducci stated - a prior Bond Authorization several years ago gave us the authority of 1.3 million that the City was going to have to go to Market, sell the bonds. We can tap into that authorization, we may not get it, but it is worth a shot.

School Calendar for 2014-2015

A draft of the revised School Calendar for 2014-2015 school year was distributed (see document "E" Draft School Calendar 2014-2015 on file with the Superintendent's Office).

Mrs. Ruggieri stated - that she would like to discuss removing the February and April vacation and creating a March vacation instead. We have President's day in February and they can have a long weekend in February.

Mrs. McFarland stated - that she does not have a problem with the days in September, but how do we address two weeks gone. Do they get out of school at the end of May?

Ms. Iannazzi stated that we are building in snow days.

Mrs. Ruggieri stated - that Cumberland just did this. They built it into theirs.

Mrs. Culhane stated - I don't want to say that teachers have used this as an excuse, but the reason they feel that the kids really need the February break is because they have children in school and they don't want to be the only district not to have a vacation and their kids do. If you talk to a lot of parents out there, they think the idea of a February vacation is ridiculous. They just come off of December break now they have February. I am not concerned about a public backlash, because I think the majority of parents want this. If school districts are just going to talk about this and not do what Cumberland did, which is just start doing it we are never going to move away from this. The northeast is one of the few places that still carry the February vacations.

Ms. Iannazzi stated - that she wanted to ask Mr. Votto about the contractual implication of this.

Dr. Lundsten stated - that there are two things to keep in mind when looking at this. First, we are already booking for 2015 graduation. Now technically graduation should be the week of June 13th. This is already booked at PPAC, which means we have to go back and change the date or go back to the system we use to use which is split it between 2 evenings. We put a temporary hold on the 15th and the 16th because we don't want them to book something else. We have looked around to see if there was another place available to accommodate and there is not. Keep that in mind. If we were going to move it back towards the 6th, and we keep the calendar the way it is and we get a couple of bad days in the winter, we are going to run into the problem of making sure they seniors have enough days.

Mrs. Culhane stated - that one of the concerns that she has is the person that his chairing the Gaspee Day parade and they are planning a huge blow out and they wanted to be certain that the East and West bands were going to have a roll in the parade. It is June 13, 2015.

Mr. Traficante asked if the bands are compensated for performing in their parade.

Mrs. Culhane asked if they had been compensated in the past.

Dr. Lundsten stated - that they probably were not.

Mr. Traficante said he will ok the removal of the holidays and

vacations, but you need to put it out there that it is not going to happen in 2014, but will in 2015. Prepare them before that. Some parents are making plans already for next year for vacation.

Mr. Votto stated - that taking the holidays away from teachers, they don't get holidays so if you take it away, it is not a big deal. However, some of the bargaining units have the holidays built in and we are in the middle of negotiations so if you go forward and put this in and don't put it out there.

Dr. Lundsten stated - that keep in mind that with all these projects we have, the longer the summer we have the better chance we have at getting the schools back open on time.

Mrs. Culhane stated - that she knows many families that take these religious holidays very seriously and that the teachers are sticking to that provision.

Ms. Iannazzi asked about having a revised calendar for Monday.

Recess for 6th grade, District-Wide

Dr. Lundsten stated - that she sent out an email that to all Principals that all elementary schools have recess, including the 6th grade. I need to make you aware that I have a conversation with the principal at Woodridge Elementary. She said that because it has already been

in place there and all her itineraries are built around it for pulls outs, special needs, etc. I said to her that they need a 15 minute break in the morning, get them outside as you can and put cones up around the black stop so that the big kids are not trampling on the little guys and next year you are to develop your schedules around that 15 minute recess.

Mrs. Culhane stated - that it was her understanding that this first happened because when the first moved 6th grade at Woodridge, they were housed at Bain and they did not have recess. So when they moved back into the school they were still working in that schedule. In subsequent years recess was never added back.

Ms. Iannazzi stated - that the teachers at Woodridge did not want the recess back, they wanted additional teaching time. I don't think teachers should be penalized for wanting more time to instruct our students.

Mrs. Culhane stated - that she does not think that either, however, she does not think that is up to the teachers themselves and that it is a district wide. It is only 15 minutes. They need a break.

Dr. Lundsten stated - that she sent the email out to everyone.

Adjourn Public Work Session to Public Meeting

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Gale, seconded by Mrs. McFarland; all were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Paula B.M. McFarland

Clerk