



Enclosure 2a
December 20, 2016

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
December 6, 2016

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Chair McConaghy welcomed everyone to the December 6, 2016, meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, declared a quorum present, and called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Present: Daniel McConaghy, *Colby Anderson, **Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Jo Eva Gaines, Karin Forbes, Marta Martinez, ***Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

Absent: Karin Forbes

[*Ex-officio, non-voting member]

[**Amy Beretta arrived at 6:07 p.m.]

[***Lawrence Purtill arrived at 5:30 p.m.]

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the meeting of December 6, 2016

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Daniel McConaghy, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

[Amy Beretta arrived at 6:07 p.m.]

[Lawrence Purtill arrived at 5:39 p.m.]

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

2a. Minutes of the November 1, 2016, Council Meeting

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the November 1, 2016, Council Meeting

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Daniel McConaghy, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

Member Forbes had to recuse herself from the vote, since she did not attend the November 1, 2016, Meeting of the Council.

[Amy Beretta arrived at 6:07 p.m.]

[Lawrence Purtill arrived at 5:39 p.m.]

At this time Chair McConaghy indicated that in the interest of time Commissioner Wagner would be foregoing the Report of the Commissioner, however, he was going to take a moment to recognize RIDE's Officer of Communications, Elliot Krieger, who is retiring from state service.

Commissioner Wagner recognized Mr. Krieger for his deep knowledge of education, expertise, and service to RIDE and to the people of Rhode Island.

3. OPEN FORUM

Next, Chair McConaghy went over ground rules for the Open Forum and respectfully asked that all who signed up to speak to keep to the 2-minute time-limit, so that everyone has the opportunity to address the Council.

Of the 64 individuals who spoke in the course of 2 ½ hours of public comment,

- o 45 individuals spoke in support of charter schools
- o 19 individuals spoke in opposition to charter schools

[Documents provided to the Council by Open Forum speakers are on file at the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.]

4. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. Charter School Renewals

- Blackstone Academy
- The Compass School

At around 8:00 p.m., Commissioner Wagner introduced the first discussion item and reminded Council members that these two charter renewals are the last two to be evaluated using the old performance framework. The evaluation looked at the financial, academic and organizational components of the charter. He then went over RIDE's recommendations, key points, and the responses to key questions posed by Council members at their November 1st meeting.

- Blackstone Academy – Council members had asked RIDE to provide some additional data as well as analysis of the relative merits and practices of a five-year renewal timeline, versus a three-year renewal timeline.

Commissioner Wagner went over the data analysis that compares students who receive free and reduced-price lunch and their PARCC results. RIDE assembled this analysis to compare Blackstone Academy to its sending high schools as well as analyzing some national practices on length of charter renewals. He expressed that given the results of the data analysis, the school warrants, and RIDE recommends, a five-year renewal.

Council Member Gaines asked for clarification on Blackstone Academy's summary of ratings (1.6) where it states that RIDE did not review nor holds the school accountable for school-developed, mission-specific, goals.

Stephen Osborn, RIDE's Chief of Innovation, responded that currently there aren't any charter schools in Rhode Island that have set, school-specific goals. He did indicate that under the new renewal evaluation process, RIDE is aiming to get more schools to leverage that and be able to tell the story of the great work they are leading.

Commissioner Wagner further clarified that traditional school districts have specific progressive targets that are required under the accountability system, but that those targets are not specific to a school, but rather something that is set statewide. Eventually, RIDE wants to develop differentiating goals, but we are not at that point yet in our district- school accountability structures or in our charter public schools.

- The Compass School

Commissioner Wagner expressed that there weren't any follow-up questions from the November 1st discussion on RIDE's recommendation of a five-year renewal for the Compass School. However, he is impacted by the challenge from the field to have the school do a better job serving the diversity of income representation in the state as well as in the county that the school serves. RIDE has reached out to the school leadership to have them enhance their recruitment efforts in getting the free and reduced lunch percentage in alignment with the sending communities.

Commissioner Wagner shared that he personally believes that Providence, working with Achievement First, has a best-practice that everyone could benefit from, which is that the charter is presented in the registration processes as an option. That shift in practice, which would have to be done collaboratively with the district, would address the majority of the concerns that have been raised about differential recruitments, skimming, more-engaged parents, less-engaged parents, higher-achieving students, lower-achieving students. It would also give every student who is registering the option to check a box where they potentially could ask to be included ultimately through a lottery practice by the charter. If the Council approves Compass' request for renewal, RIDE will work with the school to expand that recruitment effort. Another issue that was recently raised centered on lifting the 95% target that is in the school's underlying charter. Commissioner Wagner expressed that if that target was to be lifted in Washington County, that it would have an impact in the other communities that are outside the county. RIDE does not recommend the change, as those other communities were not given notice that these issues were under consideration.

Council Member Callahan expressed that she is a bit concerned that we are further reaching into other areas in order to bump-up demographics, which would once again be putting the burden on the districts that seem to have the greatest proliferation of charter schools.

Commissioner Wagner responded that there are two ways to proceed. One way is to enhance the recruitment effort within the catchment area, which is defined as 95% Washington County, and the other would be to potentially look at expanding the catchment area. RIDE is not recommending expanding the catchment area at this time because it did not give the other communities the opportunity weigh-in on the idea.

b. Charter School – Commissioner's Recommendations and the Process for the review of proposals for new and expanded charters

Commissioner Wagner began by expressing that RIDE worked very hard to bring to the Council a balanced set of recommendations, which are non-ideological and that are based on two primary values - the quality of the proposal and a community's high-need for charter

schools. As a framing comment, he expressed that he really hopes we can have more impactful conversations once this process of difficult decisions regarding expansions and new schools is over. He believes that it's more beneficial to identify best-practices and talk about instruction, organizational structure and leadership, innovation frameworks, supporting teachers, supporting professional development, engaging parents and communities, and bringing those best-practices to district schools as well as to charter public schools.

Next, Commissioner Wagner walked Council members through a high-level summary of the process for reviewing proposals for new charters and charter expansions. He went on to explain that RIDE did not release the application for new schools and expansions until the end of July, when the new rules established by the legislature were released at the end of the legislative session. All proposals went through a detailed quality review, and proposals for new schools were evaluated by independent, third-party experts (national best-practice). All proposals were also out for public review and comment for a 60-day period. The legislature did not define exactly what should occur during the public comment period nor did they define exactly what should happen at the end of the public comment period. What is required is that the Commissioner has to make a recommendation to the Council. Part of that recommendation had to place substantial weight on the educational, programmatic, and fiscal impact of each proposal, and the overall economic prudence of the proposal to the underlying city or town community. He went on to say that all of the feedback received during the 60-day public review process informed his decision and that it would be remiss of him if he did not take into account everything that came up during that time. The Commissioner's recommendations and all supporting materials were shared with the Council and posted for public review on Friday, December 2nd. In addition to this evening, the public will have the opportunity to further address the Council during the December 20th meeting.

At the December 20th Council meeting, RIDE will be recommending the approval of three proposals and the denial of four. There will also be discussion on an additional proposal (Wangari Maathai Community School), which due to a technicality is still going through the public review process.

Next, Commissioner Wagner went over the Achievement First recommendation and called-out the components that are unique to the proposal. He stressed that due to the scope of the proposal as well as the level of public interest, RIDE went even farther to provide Council members with information that will ultimately form their decision.

Commissioner Wagner went over a document titled *Review of Request for Charter School Expansion: Evaluator's Guide*, which was prepared by a nationally-recognized third party partner to get an independent set of eyes to appraise the application and make a recommendation to RIDE and ultimately the Council. He also walked Council members through the Local Impact Analysis document for two (Cranston and Providence) of the four communities (Cranston, Providence, North Providence, and Warwick) that will be impacted by the Achievement First request for expansion.

Member Purtill expressed his concern with major cuts because it will benefit those students going to charter schools without taking into account the negative impact that it will have on the students who are left behind.

Commissioner Wagner responded that all schools have to struggle with short and long-term forecasting and when looking at the number of students from Providence who would be attending Achievement First under the new proposal, those numbers are not far off from the projected student enrollment growth. Providence is close to a wash in terms of the Achievement First expansion and one could argue that Providence actually needs the Achievement First expansion because they won't have the space to educate the kids who are expected to come into the schools over the next five to ten years. If you look at five years into the expansion, Providence has an expected enrollment growth of 1,000 students over that time period.

Council Member Callahan expressed that when thinking about expected growth, we need to think about how we accommodate that projected growth. We may differ on what that strategy may be, but to divert those students to another placement is not the answer. Also, when we think about the money that is following the child, it is not necessarily one-to-one correspondence in terms of addressing the needs of the students who are not moving. We need to get at what are those programmatic implications and ask the sending school districts what they project will get cut as they lose students, and factor in higher-cost students who may be left behind.

Commissioner Wagner replied that the 93% funding that goes to the charter is not going to the charter as a bonus, but rather to cover the costs of education. As we ask programmatic questions of the districts, they have to acknowledge that they will have fewer students to educate, which may require fewer teachers and fewer buildings.

Council Member Gaines voiced that she is hearing a lot about money and process but nothing about collaboration between charters and traditional schools. As a member of the former Board of Regents, she supported the concept of charter public schools as a way to improve education for all kids. She does not believe that is currently the case and suggested adding a narrative to each charter that describes what the charter is doing to promote collaboration.

Commissioner Wagner replied that he agrees with Council Member Gaines in that it is fundamental to share best practices for collaboration in many of our charter schools. In the case of Achievement First, the school's leadership has commented that the relationship between the school and the current Providence administration has improved and that conversations between both parties have been productive and collaborative. The two renewals being discussed this evening (Blackstone Academy and Compass) are the last two schools to go through the old renewal framework, which does not call-out that piece. However, going forward, the new renewal framework rubric calls out those partnerships and will better illustrate how our charter public schools are partnering with our district schools.

Next, Commissioner Wagner went over the student demographics, educational and programmatic impact analysis and composite index score for Achievement First and the Providence School Department.

Because the N size for grade 3 Special Education students at Achievement First is too small to be reported, Council Member Callahan requests that RIDE provide data on grade 3 proficiency for non-special education students in Providence. She also expressed that rather than shifting resources to Achievement First, instead lets focus on what seems to be working programmatically and invest the resources to change the dynamics for more kids in the Providence Schools.

Commissioner Wagner replied that Providence Mayor Elorza and the Superintendent Maher have a very thoughtful plan around doing a better job getting teachers prepared to serve the needs of English Language Learners and the need to expand learning time for all students. They have also put on the table things around the organization of the schools, such as K-8 models.

There is also the ESSA work around transformation with the federal funds that come with that as well as state efforts. Commissioner Wagner agrees that we need to focus on our district schools and that more needs to be done around quality professional development for teachers and leadership work. RIDE is investing additional dollars and Mayor Elorza and Superintendent Maher are doing site-based leadership work.

Commissioner Wagner expressed that from his 30-years of experience, he does not believe that systems change in deep and profound ways unless they have to change. Providence needs to know that, and yes we need to invest in Providence, but Providence also needs to up its game big time.

Council Member Callahan voiced that in order for Providence to up its game, the district needs to have both the financial and the technical assistant resources. Furthermore, in order for the Council to make the decision that it has to make and to be prudent in terms of the implications, a conversation between now and the December 20th meeting needs to occur to project the possible programmatic cuts as a result of the potential loss of revenue to the Providence School Department.

Commissioner Wagner replied that unfortunately RIDE would have no window into the decisions that Providence would make over the next 10-years.

Council Member Callahan replied that by law Council members are charged with the responsibility of asking any questions.

Commissioner Wagner expressed that in the last session the Legislature's intent was to address the issues around the impact of charters on district schools by making an adjustment to the Funding Formula. RIDE has no capacity on how Providence navigates these waters and neither can the district, as leadership will change over the next 10-years.

Council Member Callahan replied that she has a fundamental disagreement with that as other cities and towns, such as Cumberland, have done a fiscal analysis about what the loss to the community was over a number of years. She further stated that as Council members prepare to make a decision, they are being asked to put substantial weight on the fiscal and programmatic impact of the Achievement First request for expansion, and RIDE needs to figure out a way to get the Council some better answers.

Council Member Purtill expressed that the Commissioner spend a half-hour going over the long-term financial benefits of the expansion, but to get those benefits, students have to win the lottery. He is concerned about those students whose parents are not as involved and who will miss out.

Commissioner Wagner explained that Providence is the only district that has district-wide open-enrollment and a process in place. Upon registering their child for school, every Providence parent has to sign a form and check off a box that indicates which elementary school that they would like their child to attend, including Achievement First.

Council Member Purtill is concerned that we are creating two systems that benefit some kids but not others.

Commissioner Wagner expressed that a number of people have raised the issue that if we can't do it for all we shouldn't do it for any, but he doesn't believe that's how education works. While he does not feel that students who attend Achievement First get a better education than those attending Providence Schools, we have to offer options to families while getting all districts to up their game.

Next, Commissioner Wagner went over the remaining requests for expansion:

Encl4b3- Paul Cuffee – Approve

Recommendation Drivers: Proven track record of improving student outcomes for Providence students; prioritizes serving Rhode Island's educationally disadvantaged students; and minimal programmatic and fiscal impact on the community.

Encl4b4- Segue Institute for Learning – Deny

Recommendation Drivers: Segue Institute for Learning, despite its trajectory of growth, does not yet possess a clear, sustained track record of high academic performance, specifically in mathematics.

Council Member Stevos voiced her disappointment with the Commissioner's decision, which is based mainly on the school's PARCC Assessment results. She shared that when she attended the two public hearings for Segue and visited the school she was extremely impressed by the parent and student support and by the hard work happening at the school.

Commissioner Wagner replied that test scores are proxy measures and that until RIDE expands its repertoire of measures for charter authorization; it has to rely on test scores. Of the schools that he is recommending for denial, he can point to schools serving comparable populations that are producing better results.

Council Member Callahan asked whether or not the Segue request to add an elementary school should be treated as a request for a new charter.

Encl4b5- The Greene School – Deny

Recommendation Drivers: Greene does not yet have a clear track-record of high academic performance, specifically in mathematics.

Encl4b6- The Learning Community – Approve

Recommendation Drivers: The Learning Community has proven results serving Rhode Island’s educationally disadvantaged students; significant parent demand; and minimal programmatic and fiscal impact on local communities.

Encl4b7- Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts – Deny

Recommendation Drivers: Trinity for the Performing Arts does not yet have a clear, sustained track record of high academic performance.

Encl4b8. - New Charters – Recommendation on Preliminary Approval - Charette

Commissioner Wagner explained that because this request would have resulted in a new school, RIDE had an independent third-party (SchoolWorks) evaluate the proposal, which identified specific deficiencies. The RIDE team reviewed the feedback on the evaluation and agreed with the concerns raised.

5. ACTION ITEMS

a. Approval of the Renewal of Blackstone Academy Charter School

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Karin Forbes it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to renew the charter of Blackstone Academy for a term of five (5) years to continue operations in accordance with its Charter, form July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2022, as presented.

Vote: 9 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Daniel McConaghy, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karin Forbes, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

b. Approval of the Renewal of The Compass School

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Karin Forbes, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to renew the charter of The Compass School for a term of five (5) years to continue operations in accordance with its Charter, form July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2022, as presented.

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Daniel McConaghy, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karin Forbes, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: Colleen Callahan and Jo Eva Gaines

c. Approval of Members to the YouthBuild Board of Trustees

On a motion duly made by Karin Forbes and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Members of the YouthBuild Board of Trustees, as presented.

Vote: 9 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Daniel McConaghy, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karin Forbes, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

7. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Karin Forbes and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education adjourns.

Vote: 8 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Daniel McConaghy, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karin Forbes, Jo Eva Gaines, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.