



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
December 20, 2016

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Chair McConaghy welcomed everyone to the December 20, 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, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

Absent: Karin Forbes

[*Ex-officio, non-voting member]

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the meeting of December 20, 2016

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, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

2a. Minutes of the December 6, 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 December 6, 2016, Council Meeting

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, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez,
Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

3. OPEN FORUM

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 would have the opportunity to address the Council.

Of the 41 individuals who spoke in the course of 1 ¼ hours of public comment,

- o 24 individuals spoke in support of charter schools
- o 17 individuals spoke in opposition to charter schools

[Documentation submitted and presented to the Council are on file at the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.]

4. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. Responses to questions raised by Council Members at the December 6th meeting

Commissioner Wagner began by stating that the charter process is not about ideology. RIDE tried very hard to provide thoughtful and balanced recommendations as just one part of a portfolio of options to help students be successful. He acknowledged and apologized for last week's article in the Providence Journal, which in his passion for this issue, set the wrong tone and turned a conversation that should have been about students into a conversation about adults.

Commissioner Wagner went on to explain that the reason for his recommendations, particularly for Achievement First, is very simple, in that we have a number of students and schools that are struggling. This is an opportunity to chip away at that challenge, he said. People in education often say that we can't do anything for anyone until we can do everything for everyone and that we can't fairly and equitably attack these challenges until we are able to solve poverty. He expressed that he cannot accept that theory of action and that we need to take every tool and every opportunity at our disposal to help any kid that we can.

He explained that this proposal would chip away at that challenge by collaborating with proven partners as well as continuing to support and invest in the continued progress of our district schools. This is a structural strategy that will apply healthy pressure on the system to continue to improve. Roughly ten-percent of the money going to an alternate provider to educate roughly ten-percent of the students is not inequitable, but rather what we would

expect. We are not taking any money from other students, but rather allocating money to educate students in exact proportion to their percentage in the population.

Commissioner Wagner went on to say that systems do not change unless they have to change. He is not criticizing teachers as they often get caught up in the same system that our students and families get caught-up in. Rightfully, teachers often complain that our system is not doing right by teachers and the teaching profession and the students that they attempt to serve, and they are often correct. These are systemic issues that have to be addressed and will never be addressed either in a chip-away strategy or a systemic strategy as long as we continue to perpetuate the status quo. He believes that Providence will reach and will adapt in response to this healthy pressure with good leadership and continued progress. Providence will have ten years to plan. The funding formula has been adjusted to account for unique and fixed costs, and with good leadership, he believes that Providence will thrive. Mayor Elorza received letters from 14 legislators asking him to pull away from this proposal, but he has gone on record as saying that he wants this Council to approve the full Achievement First proposal. As Chair of the Achievement First Board, Mayor Elorza has negotiated veto rights over that third elementary school and has veto power over the last 1,000 seats. In the interest of Providence, the Mayor has a powerful tool to manage this transition in that if he does not want the 2,000 seats to go to 3,000 seats, it's entirely his decision.

Commissioner Wagner also stated that charters are only a sliver of the work we do and sometimes the small slivers (testing, teacher evaluation, charter schools) suck all of the oxygen out of the air. He believes that we aren't talking about what we should be talking about, which is how we could improve teaching and learning for all students. . He expressed that once we get passed this vote, we need to turn back and focus on how to find the best practices in leadership, innovation, and teaching and learning. Wherever they occur, we need to bring those best practices to all kids in all schools, whether its charters or district schools, so everyone wins.

Commissioner Wagner ended by commenting on two items that were recently reported in the media. He shared that he was mis-paraphrased by a reporter on the fiscal impact of charter schools. He explained that he did not say that RIDE does not consider fiscal impact when making charter decisions, but that the proper context for his comments was that he was following what the legislature enacted as part of the compromised language on the underlying statute - fiscal impact on the community (city or town), programmatic impact on the schools, and educational impact on the students. He also explained that on the enrollment projections, his recommendations were not based on any assumptions of increases or decreases with projections, but rather based on demonstrated needs in Providence and a track-record of the various service providers.

Next, Commissioner Wagner went over the analysis that RIDE prepared in response to questions raised by Council members at the December 6th meeting. The concerns were the programmatic impact that Achievement First's expansion request would have on Providence, the population of special education students at Achievement First and the performance of non-special education students; both compared to Providence Public Schools; and the ways in which charters are successfully collaborating with school districts.

Council Member Callahan expressed her concerns with the very serious programmatic and fiscal impact, potential cuts on programs, and the reduction and elimination of programs to students if 3,000 students leave the Providence School District to attend Achievement First.

Council Member Purtill voiced that he is deeply concerned that if President-elect President Donald Trump's education plan goes through, then Providence could end up losing an additional 31M dollars in Title I funds. Much like Member Callahan, he too would like some reassurance that programs that serve the most vulnerable students in Providence, will not be cut, before he can vote for the expansion to Achievement First.

Council Member Callahan shared that in a recent visit to Achievement First, she was impressed by the kinds of programs being offered and that she would like to see those same programs being multiplied in all of our schools for all of our students. However, she is concerned that it won't be possible if we keep draining the resources that are necessary to do those things. She is also concerned that we are creating a separate system where some students will have what we believe to be best practices, but others won't because it's unaffordable in the vast majority of our schools.

Council Member Beretta expressed that this Board has some responsibility to make sure that we are encouraging best practices be shared between all schools and there is no reason why that cannot be accomplished. She sees this expansion as part of it, but more needs to be done to ensure that there is collaboration between the typical district schools and the charter.

Council Chair McConaghy stated that some speakers this evening were compelling in terms of their concept of collaboration and the use of the word "and" instead of "or." This needs to move away from a discussion of whether charter or district teachers love or don't love their students. There is no question that all teachers love their students and this discussion should be about collaboration and raising the tide for all schools and promoting collaboration.

Council Member Beretta expressed that when looking at charter schools in 2017, the Council needs to consider maybe having a charter school committee that can look at the data on a monthly basis. We also need to be working with schools to make sure that they are reaching

out to their communities and not only sharing, but also listening to best-practices from the traditional district schools.

Council Member Gaines stated that it is not fair to put the blame in the failing schools as it's not their fault. The Council is to blame as they are responsible for holding schools accountable. If schools are not performing and the Council is not doing anything about it, then the Council members only have themselves to blame. She expressed that she is really torn on the Achievement First proposal because she only supports the expansion to grade 12, but not the entire proposal. However, she does not think that it's fair to bind the Council to 10 years of uncertainty. She believes that the proposal needs to be uncoupled and although she's been told that it cannot be done, she blames the Council for accepting it as a bundle. Going forward, the Council needs to find a way to do a better job.

Commissioner Wagner clarified that the 10-years is an expansion timeline and if the Council approves it, it would not be approving a 10-year charter as Achievement First would still have a charter that needs to be renewed on a regular cycle. The 10-year timeframe is just a projection of how long it would take if the Council authorizes it.

Council Member Callahan agreed with Commissioner Wagner in terms of the collaboration piece. However, she expressed that we can all believe this idea of collaboration and best practices, but if we don't recognize what it takes to implement the kinds of best practices we are reporting, then we are making a grave mistake.. People are being setup and she wants the Council to consider that. She stressed that we can all talk about collaboration and we can praise the schools for doing those great things, but we can't just say that two teachers in every classroom is what the kids in our struggling schools need without addressing what it takes to make that happen. If we do, we are being derelict in our responsibility and putting the district in a quandary.

Board Chair Cottam shared that in the fall she asked a question about underperforming schools. RIDE provided at two different meetings some facts that just astounded her about Providence failing schools and how nothing had been done to address that. She stressed that there is an achievement gap that can no longer be ignored and the Council has an obligation to the children of Providence to provide them with the best education and opportunities. She voiced that she looks at the Achievement First proposal as an opportunity that is showing results and we have to pay attention to that. Chair Cottam also shared that she has spoken with the Providence Superintendent and that he shared with her some of their programs and practices that the district has been undertaking and the progress that they are making. She believes that there is no question that there are great things happening in Providence, but

when 22 of the 29 lowest-achieving schools in the State are in Providence, that is worrisome. It is concerning when 15,000 of our 18,000 lowest-performing students attend Providence schools and we need to partner together to look at that. It is incumbent upon this Council and everyone coming together to do what it takes to provide all students with the same opportunities.

Council Member Gaines shared that Newport had a school classified as a “priority school” and that RIDE worked with the district to get that school out of that classification. She understands that RIDE does not have the capacity to go into 22 schools in Providence, but isn’t there something that can be done to help those schools change their course?

Commissioner Wagner responded that it’s a really important question and one that is as part of the big mix of issues that RIDE is currently reviewing. It ranges from what is our strategy around a portfolio of options, to how do we make sure that we are providing not only school-based opportunities, but also course-based opportunities. The Governor and the General Assembly have invested resources in early-college experiences, access to PSAT and SAT information so that they can think more concretely about college opportunities, and access to high-quality career and technical education programs. We are also trying to expand career awareness to all schools so we aren’t just doing traditional academic work, but anchoring academic work in hands-on experiential learning opportunities. In order to not only tackle rigor of course experiences, but also student engagement. RIDE is also in the middle of a federal accountability law conversation around our transformation strategy and we can’t fall into the traditional approaches (more money, close schools, and fire our teachers), which isn’t the answer. Tonight’s conversation needs to be much broader as we need to talk about how we make sure that those closest to the students (teachers, principals, parents) have the most power to implement the kinds of things that they believe are most important.

Council Member Purtill also voiced that if we are going to talk about improving the Providence schools and helping students, we also need to address the poor condition of the buildings. Students need to feel important from the minute they walk in the door, but in order to address the infrastructure, more resources are needed, not taken away.

Encl4a2. - Paul Cuffee School - Approve

Commissioner Wagner explained that his recommendation to approve the Paul Cuffee School is based on the school’s track record of improving outcomes for students, serving traditionally disadvantaged students, and that the impact on the community will be minimal.

Encl4a3- Segue Institute for Learning - Deny

Commissioner Wagner explained that as demonstrated by the school's leadership this evening, Segue has been a good partner in the effort to build collaborative relationships across the state. Not recommending an expansion is different than commenting on the overall quality of the school program. RIDE is recommending that the expansion be denied as it does not believe that there is sufficient evidence to warrant an expansion.

Council Member Beretta asked if there is anything that would preclude the three schools (Segue, The Greene School, and TAPA) being denied expansions from working with RIDE over the next year and coming back to the Council with a plan that the Council could stand behind.

Commissioner Wagner answered that RIDE would be happy to work with the schools, however, he does not want to set the expectation that RIDE had misplaced standards this year and somehow is going to have different standards next year. The standards will remain the same and if the schools do not provide evidence of student achievement, the recommendation will be the same.

Encl4a4- The Greene School - Deny

Commissioner Wagner explained that The Greene School has a compelling vision for how they wish to serve students and that he has no doubt that they are serving their students in a way that is satisfying to the students enrolled in their community. However, RIDE does not believe that the evidence at this time warrants an approval.

Encl4a5- The Learning Community - Approve

Commissioner Wagner explained that The Learning Community's request is for a small expansion over a period of time. The school has done an admirable job not only in coordinating the services for the students enrolled in their school, but also coordinating services for the adults who support students across the State. The school is well-regarded by its peers across the State and for that and for their educational results, parental demand and programmatic and fiscal impact, RIDE is recommending that The Learning Community's request for expansion be approved.

Encl4a6- Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts - Deny

Commissioner Wagner expressed that Trinity Academy was the hardest of the recommendations for him. He recently visited the Trinity Academy and found that the school is absolutely finding a voice for kids who would otherwise be disconnected and disaffected. The voice of students when you talk to them is incredibly compelling. RIDE is denying the school's request for expansion as it believes that the school can leverage that strength and do even better in terms of raising student academic performance.

Encl4b7. - New Charters - Recommendations on Preliminary Approval

- Charette

Commissioner Wagner explained that Charette is a new charter proposal that RIDE is recommending not be approved at this time. The proposal is for an innovative high school model that combines blended learning with an urban planning theme. RIDE engaged a nationally-recognized, third-party provider, to help evaluate independently the school's application. RIDE agrees with the provider's recommendation that the application is not sufficiently strong to warrant approval at this time.

- Wangari Maathai Community School

Commissioner Wagner recommended that the Wangari application be denied and that similar to Charrette, RIDE engaged the support of a nationally-recognized, third-party provider to help evaluate independently the school's application. The provider reported significant concerns, which RIDE reviewed and agreed with.

5. ACTION ITEMS

5a1. Approval of the Achievement First Request for Charter Expansion Amendment

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Joyce Stevos it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to approve the Achievement First charter amendment for expansion, permitting Achievement First to enroll up to 3,112 students in grades K-12 from Cranston, North Providence, Providence, and Warwick.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 3 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Daniel McConaghy, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam,
Marta Martinez, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: Colleen Callahan, Jo Eva Gaines, Lawrence Purtill

5a2. Approval of the Paul Cuffee School Request for Charter Expansion Amendment

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to approve the Paul Cuffee School charter amendment for expansion, permitting Paul Cuffee School to enroll up to 813 students in grades K-12 from Providence.

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 2 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Daniel McConaghy, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam,
Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: Colleen Callahan and Lawrence Purtill

5a3. Approval of the Commissioner's recommendation denying the Segue Institute for Learning request for Charter Expansion Amendment

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to deny the Segue Institute for Learning Charter amendment for expansion.

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, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez,
Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

5a4. Approval of the Commissioner's recommendation denying The Greene School request for Charter Expansion Amendment

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to deny The Greene School request for charter amendment for expansion.

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, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

5a5. Approval of the Learning Community request for Charter Expansion Amendment

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to approve the Learning Community charter amendment for expansion, permitting the Learning Community to enroll up to 585 students in grades K-8 from Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence.

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 2 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Daniel McConaghy, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: Colleen Callahan and Lawrence Purtill

5a6. Approval of the Commissioner's recommendation denying the Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts (TAPA) request for Charter Expansion Amendment

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to deny the Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts (TAPA) request for charter expansion amendment.

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, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

5a7. Approval of the Commissioner's recommendation denying Charette's proposal for a new charter

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to deny the charter proposal submitted by Charette.

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, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

6. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta 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, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.