



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
December 5, 2017

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education met on Tuesday, December 5, 2017, in the PAFF Auditorium, 255 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island. At 5:32 p.m., Board Chair Cottam acknowledged that she would be chairing the meeting until Council Chair McConaghy arrived, welcomed everyone and noted for the record that Council Members Gaines and Purtill would not be attending the meeting.

Present: Daniel McConaghy*, Amy Beretta**, Antonio Burton***, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Gara Field, and Marta Martinez

Absent: Jo Eva Gaines and Lawrence Purtill

[*Chair McConaghy arrived at 5:55 p.m.]

**Student Representative - Ex-officio, non-voting member]

***Council Member Beretta arrived at 5:40 p.m.]

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Karen Davis it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the meeting of December 5, 2017

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Gara Field, and Marta Martinez

YEAS: 5

NAYS: 0

[Council Member Beretta arrived at 5:40 p.m.]

[Council Chair McConaghy arrived at 5:55 p.m.]

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

2a. Minutes of the November 21, 2017, Council Meeting

On a motion duly made by Marta Martinez and seconded by Karen Davis, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the November 21, 2017, Council Meeting

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Gara Field, and Marta Martinez

YEAS: 5

NAYS: 0

[Council Member Beretta arrived at 5:40 p.m. and Council Chair McConaghy arrived at 5:55 p.m.]

3. OPEN FORUM

One individual representing the Teachers Advisory Council (RITAC) addressed concerns with the Social Emotional Learning Standards recently endorsed by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.

Six individuals spoke in support of the Wangari Maathai Charter School proposal.

Eleven individuals representing the Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts spoke in opposition to Commissioner Wagner's recommendation of the school's request for expansion.

Five individuals representing the Segue Institute for Learning spoke in opposition to Commissioner Wagner's recommendation of the school's request for expansion.

A teacher at the Times2 Academy addressed his concerns with changes made by the school's new administration.

One individual representing the RI Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals spoke in support of Commissioner Wagner's recommendation of the Segue Institute for Learning request for expansion.

One individual representing the Central Falls Teachers Union spoke in opposition to Segue's request for expansion.

Materials provided to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education by Open Forum speakers and/or submitted to be shared with Council members, are on file at the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER

Commissioner Wagner began his report by sharing that in support of the Governor's Third Grade Reading Challenge, RIDE had a hugely successful Share Your Favorites Campaign in social media last week, with more than 650 posts across platforms where educators, policymakers, community leaders and families shared their favorite books. This initiative came out of the Children's Cabinet as an effort to promote the joy of reading and advance literacy.

Next, Commissioner Wagner addressed a recent report released by the Annie Casey Foundation on achievement gaps, specifically for Hispanic Latino students. He expressed that although no one is surprised to hear that there have been achievement gaps for quite some time, what was most shocking and unacceptable is that Rhode Island's achievement gap is now the largest in the nation. He went on to say that, although discussions have been taking place to address the issue, this report only further reminds us of the urgency of the matter. He then called-out four areas necessary to begin addressing the issue:

- The importance of a high-quality curriculum and instructional resources for teachers;
- Focus on leading indicators to create opportunities to close outcome gaps;
- Expand the funding formula to recognize the unique learning needs of English Language Learners and fund them appropriately; and
- Work with statewide partners, including the RI Foundation and RI College, in supporting the effort of getting more teachers certified to support second language acquisition of our students.

Commissioner Wagner voiced that language acquisition needs to stop being seen as a deficiency or as a drain in the system, but rather as an asset, which will advance us as a people, as a state, as a nation, and as an economy.

Commissioner Wagner ended his report by voicing that one of the best ways to strengthen traditional school districts that will always provide the vast majority of services to the vast majority of students is to be sure that there are appropriate pressures placed on them. Staying nimble, responsive and always striving to get better is driven not only internally by local leadership and dedicated professionals who strive and struggle to make their districts strong, but also through external pressures. Those external forces often come through fast change pressures of families having school choice, and charter schools need to be viewed as part of that positive impact that support the needs of all students.

Commissioner Wagner ended his report by sharing that Mayor Elorza is refusing to sign the final agreement, which will permit Achievement First Rhode Island to expand by 1,000 seats, as approved by the Council last year, unless the City of Providence is reimbursed for those funds. Commissioner Wagner reminded the Council that those funds do not belong to the district as they were raised by the taxpayers for educating the youth of Providence and should go to those entities providing the services.

4. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. Charter Schools - Proposals for Expanding

Enclosure 4a1 - Segue Institute for Learning

To set the context for the charter school expansion discussion, Commissioner Wagner addressed a public comment made earlier in the evening around a school having earned the right to expand. He clarified that no charter school has the right to a renewal or expansion as it is something that is done based on a process. RIDE does not view the bar for renewal to be the same as the bar for expansion, as a school's underlying growth needs to first be addressed before an expansion is authorized.

Next, Pascale Pierre, Charter School Specialist, went over the Segue Institute for Learning's request for expansion. She highlighted that the school, which is currently a 6-8 school serving 235 students from Central Falls, is requesting an amendment to its charter to increase the school's enrollment from its authorized enrollment of 240 students in grades 6-8, to 360 students across grades K-8, by 2025-26 school year. Ms. Pierre shared that the quality of the application and capacity interview revealed a lack of detail for the strategic planning of the operational changes necessary for the expansion, specifically for staffing and facilities. While the school has made significant growth as measured by the state's accountability system, the school does not yet possess a clear sustained record of accomplishment of high academic performance. The Commissioner's recommendation is for the Council to deny Segue's request for expansion.

Council Members discussed Segue's request for expansion, including whether or not the school was made aware of the Commissioner's decision in advance, was provided the opportunity to respond to RIDE's concerns, and RIDE's role in supporting the school in attaining a positive recommendation.

To assist them in making a decision, Council Members requested that RIDE provide them with additional analysis by the end of the week:

- 2017 charter school applications, summary of Segue's Capacity Interview and comparison to previously successful expansion applications, specifically Achievement First Rhode Island.
- Proficiency of English Language Learners and Hispanics/Latinos.
- Number of Central Falls residents who submitted applications to RI charter schools in elementary grades for enrollment in Fall 2017.
- Fiscal impact on the Central Falls community.

Enclosure 4a2 - Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts (TAPA)

Commissioner Wagner addressed earlier remarks in which it was stated that if the school were only compared to Providence students, exclusive of Classical High School students, they would be doing just fine. He finds the statement quite problematic as it assumes that the school is serving the community well as long as you take the smartest test-based students out of the equation. Making an argument that the school is doing fine because it is doing slightly better than Providence, is hardly a compelling argument as students at Classical are Providence students and appropriately belong in any comparison of Providence as a sending district. Asserting that the school is doing fine in comparison to Providence is hardly a compelling argument as RIDE is looking for charter schools to do well; one of the durative comparisons is comparison to the sending districts. In addition, a comprehensive index score of 52 is not what RIDE is looking for. Commissioner Wagner commended the school for continuing to make progress, for its recent leadership transition, and for providing an extremely valuable service to students interested in the arts, which is underprovided in Rhode Island.

Ms. Pierre went over TAPA's request for expansion and highlighted that the school is an independent charter located in Providence, currently authorized to serve up to 204 students in grades 7-12 from Providence. TAPA requested an amendment to its charter to increase the charter's enrollment to 254 students in grades 7-12. Although TAPA has produced some commendable student outcomes, it does not yet possess a clear, sustained track record of high academic performance. The Commissioner's recommendation is for the Council to deny TAPA's request for expansion.

b. New Charters - Recommendations on Preliminary Approval

Commissioner Wagner explained that the two proposals being discussed this evening (Charette Charter School and Wangari Maathai Community School) are being recommended for preliminary approval, with final approval contingent on the completion of all pre-opening requirements and conditions established by RIDE. The two schools will continue to serve part of the Providence community and have partnered with two nationally recognized service providers in Providence (The Highlander Institute and the New England Base Camp), to advance personalized learning and competency-based learning approaches; also a goal of the Providence School Department.

Enclosure 4b1 - Charette Charter School

Ms. Pierre went over RIDE's recommendation to grant preliminary approval to the Charette Charter School proposal for a new charter to open in the school year 2019-20, with final approval contingent on the completion of all pre-opening requirements and conditions established by RIDE. The school proposes to open an independent charter serving and located in Providence and will serve grades 9-12, 168 students (at scale), with 84 students, grades 9 and 10, enrolled in the first year of operation.

Council Members asked where Rhode Island is in terms of its charter cap and if there are currently other proposals in the pipeline.

Director Darrow replied that the state charter cap is 35 schools and that there are currently 23 charter schools operating in the state. The two charter proposals up for preliminary approval are currently the only ones in the pipeline.

Enclosure 4b2 - Wangari Maathai Community School

Ms. Pierre went over RIDE's recommendation to grant preliminary approval to the Wangari Maathai Community School proposal for a new charter to open in the school year 2019-20, with final approval contingent on the completion of all pre-opening requirements and conditions established by RIDE. The school proposes to open an independent charter serving and located in Providence. The school seeks to serve grades K-8, 324 students (at scale), with 144 students, grade K, 1, 5 and 6, enrolled in the first year of operation.

Prior to adjourning, Commissioner Wagner addressed an issue that came up during the public comment period regarding the Times2 Academy, a Providence School Department charter. He pointed out that as a charter authorizer, RIDE has a rather limited role. When there are concerns about district-charters, RIDE typically goes to the charter operators, which in this case is the Providence School Department. RIDE is aware of the issues and is working with Providence and Times2 Academy to address them.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Marta Martinez and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was

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

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

YEAS: Daniel McConaghy, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Gara Field, and Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 7:28 p.m.