

MINUTES
WOONSOCKET PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2009
Special Meeting with Commissioner Gist
Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center
Multimedia Room 303

Attendees: Cindy Stepanian (PAC Co-Chair), Denise Auclair (PAC Co-Chair, Harris Elementary School delegate), Paul Boucher (Community member), Brenda Galvin (SELAC delegate), Vimala Phongsavanh (NeighborWorks), Marc Garceau (Dir. of Admin.& Parent Involvement), Rick Ferguson (WMS Ass't. Principal), Dr. Garcia (WHS Principal), Stephanie Roberts (Elementary Teacher Alt. Delegate/Harris TIME teacher), Donna Houle (School Success Coalition), Eleanor Nadeau (School Committee member), Cathy Pettit (parent), Linda Majewski (School Committee member), Marc Dubois (School Committee Chair), Dr. Robert Gerardi (Superintendent of School), Commissioner Deborah Gist, Felicity Dionne (Beacon Charter School, parent) Anita McGuire-Forcier (School Committee member), Paula Dube (Leo Savoie parent), Sue Rochefort (WHS delegate, WHS PTO President), Tony Gabrielle (Community member), Carmen Boucher (RIPIN), Evelyn Mack-Loggins (Fairmont parent), Tara Dubois (WHS Alt. delegate), Jennie Kithes (WHS parent), Linda Filomeno (Dir. of Literacy), Lynn Kapiskis (SELAC Chair), John Ward (City Council member), Amanda Reeves (Globe parent), Diane DeCoste (WMS Music Booster), Cathy Rocco (Sodexo), Ellen Shalvey (Sodexo)

Meet and Greet, Welcome event for Commissioner Gist:

The meeting started with a light dinner served in honor of Commissioner Gist. Students of the Culinary Arts and Hospitality Program at the Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center prepared and served the dinner.

After dinner, the meeting moved to the Multimedia Room for question and answer period. The meeting was opened with a power point presentation (see attached) regarding Parent Advisory Council (PAC) Mission statement, by-laws, representatives, accomplishments, future projects, and upcoming events. Thereafter, a round-the-table introduction and discussion.

Intro: Welcome and thank you for coming to our Special PAC meeting with the Commissioner. We are honored to have her here to meet and listen to all our supporters of PAC. Parent delegates, administrators, faculty and community members and Resource Agencies. To make sure everyone has a chance to voice their concerns we will go around the table and give everyone about 2 minutes to express themselves. Please do not interrupt others while they speak and at the end we will have the Commissioner give her response.

Power Point Presentation: PAC Accomplishments, Goals & Objectives,

Discussion:

Linda Filomeno: Dir. of Literacy, Professional Devlp. & English Language Learners. I will pass so the parents can make their comments or ask questions.

Evelyn Mack-Loggins: Parent of students in Fairmont and WHS. I, to have concerns but am already in contact with the Commissioner's office so I will let others speak.

Jen Kithes: WHS & WMS Parent. My kid was in the district from the beginning. I really have no one concern, rather have lots of concerns but will wait.

Tara Dubois: WHS Delegate, I have 3 children in the high school and I too am interested in listening and taking it in.

Tony Gabrielle: Parent of a freshman at the high school, parent volunteer, my question to you Commissioner is the fair funding formula on want to know what your stances are on that and how would you rework giving money to the Woonsocket School System.

Carmen Boucher: I wear two different hats but actually I'm going to bring issues so I going to speak as part of my agency. I work for the Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN). I started working there after I had been involved at the parent level here in Woonsocket. I have two children here in the district. At the time when my daughter was in third grade, I became involved through a SALT visit and a teacher indication and then from there I started growing with in learning through the guidance of Ms. Filomeno, Ms. Tincknell, and other professionals who have helped me. And through that process, that is how I learned about Title I and how I ended up with RIPIN. I am there as a professional working with the school district. I was very fortunate that back in 2005, I was one of the people who helped organize the Woonsocket PAC as a Woonsocket citizen and as a parent. I am so glad that Mr. Ward is here because he was there at the first meeting back on July 8th 2005 and Tracy and a lot of the parents that were there then and are still here now. Within RIPIN right now, I am happy that I was able to acquire the knowledge to be able to inform and mostly look forward to learning more about laws and advocacy. This is very helpful and administration was open to it. So this makes a difference. Parents know and parents want to be leaders but also working with the partnership of the school and moving things forward. So I am very fortunate that I learned that within my work and I was able to share that with the PAC. Today, because the group has acquired so much knowledge and empowerment, I will no longer be needed here as a RIPIN Representative. I will no longer be coming in as this position. I do understand that with other districts, we want to make sure that what is here we could replicate in other districts throughout the State. Parents here spend so much time scheduling, going to meetings and they are working parents as well. They are very dedicated to their children's education. It is nice to see them doing their agenda individually and inviting administration to come in, and the School Committee, and City Council, and the public. I just wanted to thank everyone for all the work they are doing. Basically, my question to you or just my suggestion to you is that everybody asks for money and actually I'm not. What I am going to ask you for that I would like to see every child in Rhode Island get books that are up-to-date. Have administrators and teachers be trained all at the same time so there would be no difference what is being taught and what books are being used in East Greenwich and what books are being used and in Woonsocket. If we could get that, that would be a win/win situation to our kids. They are all being tested with the same test and expected to have the same knowledge. Let's make sure that we at least give them all the same training. Teachers cannot give the up-to-date education they want to give if they don't have the resources. Let's at least start by giving that. I am not asking you for money, I am asking you to give them books and for all teachers to have the same training so all kids could benefit for it. For that I thank you.

Sue Rochefort: I am the WHS PTO President and like Tony was saying the fair funding is a concern and I am sure that everyone else is going to have this concern also however that was on my list. As Carmen, the books for the kids at the high school are a concern. I know my daughter doesn't have all the books for every single class, so it does make it difficult. I was wondering if this is something that might be coming down the pike. Is there a way that every kid, whatever class they may have, could have a book for that class? The other thing that I would like is better communication between emails between the teacher and the parent. Many teachers do communicate at the beginning with the syllabus at the beginning of the school year with the parent that they can inform them and talk to them. I just wish that all of them would do that but I don't know if this is something they have to do but it is very helpful from the teachers that do this. Parent involvement for the PTO is not that great. I do have concerns with this. Keeping our schools safe is I think, a big concern that a lot of our parents have concerns with and something we all want for our children.

Paula Dube: I have two children in the elementary system. One is a typical child; one is a special needs child so my concern basically is the fair funding formula which would make sure that everything is provided that they need for a great education throughout the system.

Anita McGuire-Forcier: I am on the School Committee and I have served two terms and I am running for a third. I already had the great opportunity of meeting you and bringing up the issue of the fair funding formula, however, I don't know if we were able to get into detail. In Rhode Island, we have a tax cap and we are not allowed to tax up to a certain amount. We were promised that we would have a fair funding formula, no more unfunded mandates and the other two never came through and I was wondering if you knew why. I know that you are new but we were promised this and then they went through with the tax cap but there was no fair funding formula and no change in unfunded mandates. Also I have concerns with a lot of the children that we have that are falling through the cracks. If you have an IEP you have a better chance being noticed but I have met many parents that don't even know how to properly get their children tested. They do not realize that they have to come in with a hand written note requesting that their children be tested. Actually, some of the parents don't even feel comfortable writing a letter. So, I was wondering if there is another way that we could come up with where the parent can suggest to the teacher that their children be tested for different learning disabilities. I do believe that if all children were reading at third grade level by third grade, we would need less jails and spots in training schools and it has been proven. Right now we have a waiting list in our jails. It costs more money in there and I would rather put it in while they are young. I would like to hear your input on that.

Felicia Dion: My daughter went to Bernon Heights Elementary School and she had a great experience there. Now she is a sophomore at Beacon Charter School and I am on the board. I am here because I was originally here when the PAC was at Bernon Heights Elementary School and was in communication with sharing information and different ideas with the PAC Co-Chairs. I think I would like to advocate for RIDE and other associations to consider having a statewide PAC so we can all share information and ideas that maybe East Greenwich and Woonsocket might not know about, therefore, they won't know to advocate for it. So if there was an opportunity to have a statewide representation on a parent level. I know that the legal council is taking the special education model and created language which is parent friendly especially to parents that may be not college educated. If there is an opportunity to create the same type of language, for parents to be involved educationally in partnering in their school district, as well as a way to get that information so we can distribute it for all the PACs that we know are involved.

Dr. Robert Gerardi: Superintendent of Schools. I want to quickly thank the PAC. In over my twenty years of working in Rhode Island, I have never seen this type of parent involvement and when I came here, I was extremely intrigued and really enjoyed participating in every meeting I possible could. And as you can tell with the other people with questions, this is a great group who really, really helped guide us. I thank them for inviting you and creating this forum. This is the way forums can work. We start off where everyone starts by introducing themselves and talks just a little bit. And I want to thank you because you are a very busy lady with a very difficult job. You have already come to our system and you have had meetings with the School Committee members and Councilman John Ward.

You have helped us though some difficult challenges already and it is nice to see you here, caring about parents and listening to them and responding to them. I want to thank both groups and just tell you that I am so impressed and happy to be working with them.

Marc Dubois: I am Chairman of the Woonsocket School Committee. I also want to thank the PAC and the Commissioner for making yourself accessible to us this evening. I do have a couple questions. One would be unfunded mandates, and do you take into consideration the cities' and towns' availability to fund those? I know, ideally, we would all like these mandates and we all want our children to succeed. I also would like to know what your thoughts are on regionalization of districts in the State or having one large district within the State.

Eleanor Nadeau: I am a member of the Woonsocket School Committee. I had the opportunity to meet Commissioner Gist two weeks ago. I would like the PAC to know that Anita McGuire-Forcier and I are members of the Building Committee and will be happy to work with you on the upcoming WMS open house. Let me know what I can do to help in any way. Most of you came to every high-rise with us; with your children

and you (PAC) are the people who are responsible for getting it to the public and getting it done. We have two beautiful facilities, which we are very proud of and you will be proud of when you see these buildings.

Approximately in 2006, you (PAC) had a legislative assembly where you asked questions to the state legislature. Because we have so many unfunded mandates that come out of the General Assembly that we need that close communication with them. You guys were such an amazing group. What I would like to see happen is that again because we as a local district shouldn't have to find the money for those mandates, many of those should be eliminated and that would be very helpful. This is also taking things away from our children like textbooks which they really need and other things which probably are not a priority.

Linda Majewski: I am a PAC Liaison and a School Committee Member. Is there any chance of you bringing back Article 31 money for professional development (a big mandate under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and yet this year Article 31 money is frozen. Lastly, one of the things that were mentioned over the years was special education reporting under NCLB, looking at the possibility of a gap test for our students in special education for those that are not eligible for the one percent, that are not exempt and for those students who clearly capped significantly.

Donna Houle: I also wear two hats. One of them School Success Coalition and work with parents in the school department. My other hat is as a parent. My question is they do state testing for grades 3-8 and then they don't take it again until 11th grade, they only take it once, and it counts towards graduation. My question is, since they don't take it in 8th, in 9th and 10th how can they expect them to maintain taking these tests in 11th grade? I think they should continue taking it in 9th and 10th so they have that continuation going forward and they don't have that break and they know that it is important throughout their entire years and not just 11th grade.

Rick Ferguson: I am an Assistant Principal for the WMS and PAC Delegate. I am hoping that we are able to gain the fair funding formula.

Stephanie Roberts: I am a TIME Teacher at Harris School and a teacher delegate to PAC. One of the concerns we have and an issue we were hoping to address is extending programming at schools, before and after. Students in a TIME program can come to programs before and after. There is a very targeted and limited audience, so we have a lot of other parents looking for programs before and after school in the school. So we hope that come the future we can do that.

Mark Garceau: I am the Director of Instruction and Administration. I am new to the district after 20 years in Cranston where I was most recently known as the principal. I want to thank PAC for a wonderful meeting.

Vimala Phongsavanh: I represent the community preservation networks, Blackstone River Valley and I am an education program coordinator. One of my main questions for you would be your idea on extending learning opportunities, what Ms. Roberts was saying. Whether it would be work towards development or college credits. I just want, I guess, different pathways to success and I just wanted to get some of your thoughts on that.

Lourenco Garcia: Principal of WHS. Also want to thank PAC for a wonderful format. We have worked together over e-mails. We need Article 31 money for professional development to provide teachers with professional teaching and learning skills that meet cultural academic competencies to serve the needs of students of linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Another reason why Article 31 is so important is that we need our teachers to be equipped with cultural competence. We have shortage of textbooks and that is a need felt across all departments. Teachers want to do more but can't because of lack of funds. We also have limited data materials for classrooms.

Brenda Galvin: SELAC Delegate and WMS PTO President and Parent. All set everyone already mentioned my concerns.

Cathy Pettit: Member of the School Success Coalition. No children in the system but very involved. WMS SIT/PTO, CCF 21st Century after school programs. Involved with Ellie Mae grant this summer enjoyed seeing the children having fun. Looking forward towards the Global agenda the Commissioner is moving towards.

Amanda Reeves: Has a 3rd grader. Would like consistency, communication available for education.

DianeDeCosta: WHS Music Booster. Disappointed that Music is being discontinued.

Lisa Alves: WHS Chorus Teacher. Disappointed in budget cuts. It's just not Woonsocket it's all around the state. We need the fair funding formula. We had many cuts in music. We need to know how to bring Arts to the level that students need without funding.

Tracey Belliveau: WHS Special Education Teacher- A lot of our kids aren't able to meet the GSEs to get an actual high school diploma. As it stands right now, I don't believe that there is a state wide certificate of completion or some kind of secondary diploma for these type of kids. NECAP testing – It bothers me greatly that we have a very high population of poor children, special education children, and when we compare our numbers with districts with far lower amount of special education kids, and poverty driven children, it really bothers me. It makes us look bad. I would also like to see all the districts share a state-wide electronic communications. Other districts use other software. I would like us to all share and maybe cost will go down and maybe we can have the same portfolio system so all teachers can share lesson plans, share information. If we share the cost, we all have the same thing, and it would be much more effective and we would all benefit.

John Ward: Member of the City Council, spent 10 years on the School Committee, served 5 years as a school business official, and I am now Finance Director for the Town of Lincoln and a Certified Public Accountant. Thank you Commissioner for coming and thank you PAC. PAC had died 8 years ago they only had 2 parents so when their children left the school system they did to. Told the next group (Carmen Boucher, Tracey Belliveau) that they needed to make sure if they did it again that they had parents who could continue the works of the group. It seems like you planted some seeds and it has grown into a garden that flourished. I am not a Diplomat; I try to get fairness for everyone, State not just Woonsocket. No matter what I advocate for it is based on fairness for everybody. I don't fight for fair funding for Woonsocket, I fight for fair funding for the State because when we get that, we will get fair funding for Woonsocket. I also recognize when I see mandates, when people speak of mandates, a thought just crossed my mind. I think part of the problem is the general assembly is taking away our role and micro-managing. None of these mandates are legislative mandates. The Department of Education has laws that tell us to achieve things, accomplish things like a policy would and then you would establish your regulations but you are flexible enough to allow modifications for things that would work locally that may not work across the State. I think only of the argument or debate over bus monitors. You have, in the law, the ability to grant waivers from the bus monitor rule or an alternative that you consider to be a balanced safe means of transportation for children. I will simply finish with this, with all of those things I now know and do, I don't know what I can offer you but if you think I can and want my phone number, simply ask me and I will be at your disposal.

Lynn Kapiskis: Chair for SELAC and parent. I would like to reiterate gap testing for our children in terms of standardized testing. I would also like to reiterate alternate diplomas, they should receive something for coming to school everyday and working. Another is to have plain English guidelines for special education parents. Lastly, stability for children who have a need for a one on one. Concern is bidding and bumping rate. Per Dr. Gerardi, it is the contractual obligation that is the problem here.

Paul Boucher: Parent. If there was funding that came to the City but no guidelines in how to spend that money, then the money kind of gets put in places that it doesn't need to go and gets used for things that are not necessarily of use. If there was more of a direction where the money could go, like be assigned to different areas of education so it is used properly, like getting textbooks. That should be more informative for fair funding.

Cindy Stepanian: PAC Co-Chair and Parent. Concerns about special education classrooms. They are not having the support in aides they need and it brings great concern to teaching the children in the classroom. I know with the budget being cut significantly but not having teachers in there to focus on children's education and not having the aide that you need, really takes a lot away from the special education need. IEPs are very difficult to get. Parents try to go through the process and they get less and a lot stop trying because it is very difficult with all the barriers to go through, so a process that is more parent friendly. Informing them is critical about doing it and helping them through it, knocking down that wall. If you all see it, the principals, teachers and the parents then everybody should be on the same board, it shouldn't be identified that the parent has to request to go through that process. Again, the fair funding formula whatever you can do to get it. We need it here in Woonsocket and we need it in Warwick. We will be behind you as long as it is fair. Each student needs to be treated equally and with education comes financials.

Denise Auclair: PAC Co-Chair and Parent. With budget cuts and all the talk back and forth, we don't know whether we should move out of this city or what is going on. For example, music has been hit hard. Because it is being discontinued the School Department is going to try offering a music program before school starts 7:00am. Which will make this impossible for parents who have more than one child to get ready for school like I do. If we had a fair funding formula, at least we will be on the same playing field as other districts. It is just not fair to our children to go to school every day and try and they can't have something that the next town may have. Even as far as afterschool programs. Now as PAC Co-Chair, times have changed in the past three years and I personally feel that there is more willingness and need to have parent involvement in our schools. There still is work to be done from both parties, parents and schools reaching out. Communication is the key and that is my obsession. Working together we can get it done but there are a couple things that we need help on, is at the State level as a parent group. I was indirectly part of the PIRC board and as I recently checked (because we are losing Linda and Carmen), I am trying to get more involved to bring back more information. So we were trying to find out the next date for the PIRC board and we just found out that it is no longer a board that it was in an advisory committee right now. Since Woonsocket already has representation, they didn't need us at this point. PIRC pushing away parents is like a slap in the face. So for PAC my question is, is there a person at your office that would be the parent connection, that we could contact or they can send us things when there are new mandates or something we need to know to share with our families? Or someone if we have a question that we can send your way?

Commissioner Deborah Gist:

There is a lot to take care of here. You have been helpful. As you may know, I am visiting all the districts right now. I have never left, in all the meetings, with five pages of notes. Truly amazing and I am incredibly impressed. I just want to thank you all so much for inviting me and having reached out to me very early on. I look forward to our work together. As you all were talking, I started organizing some feed back. I noticed, in a lot of ways, it falls into to what I have identified as five priorities for the State. I thought I would respond to the points you have made by using those - and there are a few others that didn't quite fit in there that I wanted to address as well. As you can see by the chart, the students will always be the center of everything that we do. We want to make sure that all students are ready for success in college careers in life. I am going to make every decision based on what is in the best interest of the student. Back to the chart, the arc around the top is just acknowledging that a system of education alone is not what makes sure that every child is ready for success. We need our families, the students' him or herself, and their involvement. There are a lot of community based organizations, etc, all of those which makes up a rich community. Back to the chart, priorities are represented by the two circles and the three parade kind of thing. The one that is at the center is excellent educators. That is representing the fact that there is nothing more important than the quality of the teacher in every classroom. At the end of the day, if we had an excellent educator, I don't mean a decent one, I mean a great, amazing educator in every classroom we would be where we need to be. Some of the topics you were talking about like professional development, I think directly affects that area. The second is great schools which we also call

accelerating all schools towards greatness. We need all schools in the State to improve. All schools! All districts across the State need to improve. We will not have failing schools in the State of Rhode Island anymore. The schools that are failing persistently, and I don't like to use failing, I think - struggling - a lot. I just mean schools that are not performing. So we are going to take comprehensive action and this does not mean, in any way shape or form, that anybody is blaming the people, the teachers, the students, the families, anybody in schools where we intervene but rather acknowledging what's happening isn't working. And know what we tended to do for years and years is that we fix one little thing and then we are willing to wait like three years to see if that works. Then we wait three years and maybe it helps a little but it really doesn't work. So then we fix one more thing wait three more years, and the next thing we know those students are out of school and their kindergarteners have started and then we are back where we were. We just have to acknowledge that we do not know exactly what's not working but what's happening is not working so we have to do something more significant.

We just want to be sure that we have standards in place where your students, we are just not making sure what they're receiving is consistent with what is being received by others across the State, which I agree are both very important, but that you are making sure that you are looking at what students are receiving from the best performing countries in the world. We know that our children are just as capable as the children in South Korea or Finland or Australia. When you were talking about consistency, I definitely agree with those points. I think the standards are the key for that as opposed to necessarily the lessons or the curriculum because I think it is important to be able to be more flexible on that so that teachers and students, so there can be some basis on what they're excited about that year and you know that you can kind of be flexible, but the content is the same. So in other words, if you were a third grader, you know what you are supposed to be learning in third grade but whether you learn it October vs. November, or if you do it this way or that way, the expectations are the same. So I agree with that but I just wanted to clarify a little bit different on how things got like that. Some things came up about sharing information, having specific information and that made me think about the second one about data and having good data to grow not just in one point of time and having good data to do that, making information accessible for everyone. The fifth one we talked about that one a lot and it is about resources and having a fair funding formula in the State of Rhode Island that is equitable, that is transparent, that is consistently applied, and that is predictable. That is absolutely on my priority list. Obviously it requires a legislative change; the general assembly, we'll have to work with them to get that in place. But it is really, really important. One of the things that I want to point out about that is, that I think it is really important that we have that funding formula, that the money follows the child and all those pieces but that the formula itself, which is basically the way I think about it, is the way you distribute State aid and how that is done.

But really there is a bigger conversation very closely related to that and that is the funding system and how funding helps education only in this State and what the tax structures are and what local communities contribute are compared to what State contributes and how all that works together. So the formula is also what is important in that system in getting that improved because there is a big problem there too. In our research around the funding formula, is that - in DC we have weights. We had weights for different grades, we had weights for low-income, we had weights for special education, we had weights for ELL, etc. But in the research we started, we noticed that rather than weighting specifically for special education and ELL, that if you focused on income and you make sure that weight is really strong, you actually pick up the other people. The correlation is so strong you actually pick up the other people. The benefit to that is that you don't end up with over-identification of children with special needs because people feel if they do that then they would get more funding but rather you can try to serve children within general education. Obviously, if they need special education you need to make sure they have access to that. But we don't want to make people feel that they have to identify in order to get the resources they need for their children. Same thing with ELL, if you exit them, then you don't get the money anymore. Career and Technical Education has to be factored in how funding is distributed. That was one of the things that Commissioner McWalters has brought up to me very early on. In fact, before I even came for an interview, he brought this issue about technical education and explained the whole thing to me that how the original idea was there were going to be centers and regions. Obviously I don't have the depth of background that you all do. I do know that system has broken down. Now that it is broken

we have to figure out how to fix it and make sure that students across the State have access to high quality career and technical education as you all provide. However, you provide it as a cost to your community and the communities that have to pay tuition and I don't even know if they cover this, probably not. So it doesn't cover the cost, therefore you are paying more and they are also paying, but if you live in the Davies' region they don't. It is just crazy. Also in the funding, textbooks came up. Off the bat, I would say that absolutely teachers and students should have access to the materials they should need without a doubt. Let me bend your mind a little bit about what Dr. Garcia spoke a little bit about here, is having no textbooks, that is not okay. Here is having some textbooks but not enough or outdated, that is not okay. But here is having some textbooks so we can say we need to go from wherever we are here to where every child has a textbook in every classroom. I would encourage you to go here, which is how do you provide teachers and students with the content and information they need to be well-educated and supported in their subject but re-thinking whether or not textbooks are the right way to do that. I would say that you could be a leader nationally and certainly in the State with re-thinking how that is done because as Dr. Garcia said, the minute those books are printed they are out-of-date. So there is a lot of money that goes into investing in the books, distributing them, redistributing because they get lost, whatever, whatever, and replenishing them. The creation of knowledge, as I'm sure you know, is changing so rapidly, that this has become a bigger issue. Shared services, also in this one, we have efficiencies. Someone has brought up regionalization and I would say that I am not going to have this on my agenda that we should regionalize that I certainly have on my agenda that we should use our funding more efficiently so that we have more of it going to the classroom.

If regionalization is a way to get that done, then I would definitely encourage that. The point that Paul made about funding coming and then what happens to it, I would think that the unified charter of accounts would help a lot with that and this is the accounting system that all the districts and charter schools in the State are using now. Consistently that when a district takes a budget and you can see how funds are budgeted and spent when using common definitions and common line items or whatever. What this allows us to do is understand how other different districts are investing their funds and it even can allow you to identify districts that are moving to achievement rapidly. You can ask, where is their money going and what is it that is making a difference to them? The other thing that was probably in this category was the unfunded mandates and obviously I care about that a lot. I will be more than willing to figure out any way to relieve communities from mandates that are not necessary and that you have found a reasonable alternative to. What I can't bend is where things are in law where it doesn't say I have flexibility and there are some things in federal law that we definitely don't have the flexibility around. But then also where it is going to be less likely is if it starts to effect services to our children or particular areas where it affects our performances. I hope that you all have seen that I am willing to have that conversation and will do everything I can to help with that area. The new BEP, that a lot of people were concerned about the warnings, that was pretty evident to everyone that the librarians were concerned that it didn't say to us that every school that has this many kids has to have a librarian. The new BEP says we have to provide a high quality library media services program. We have to invite flexibility to be able to figure out alternatives and if you have a public library next door to your school and you want to work out a thing there is no reason why we would require you to utilize a school librarian.

The last thing that was mentioned was bumping. I think I have been crystal clear where I stand on that. I absolutely hate that we have to make decisions about who is in what classroom. And who is assigned to what child should be based on that child's needs. It is not about the adult and this is how I started about making every decision based on what is in the best interests of the children. It is just not about the adult. So I think professionals including our teachers should be treated respectfully. I think they need to have great environments, working together, learning, and have support in everything they need to be great. But when it comes to deciding how we serve children, we have to make those decisions based on what the children need.

For communications, I got some great ideas tonight. The state-wide PAC is a really interesting idea, and I'd like to follow up with you guys on that. Somebody mentioned the "Parents E-mail." We've been talking about doing some kind of newsletter because, but that makes me feel old-fashioned. But maybe some sort of a List Serve, or something where you can just be kept up to date on what's happening. In the meantime, while I'm considering these things, if you're on Facebook, I'm on Facebook, and I'll talk about this meeting tonight, for example, on

my update I post articles. I posted a video this weekend about, kind of on that communication on this like rethinking education type of thing, and we have a poll exchange with a bunch of parents and even a high school student I met in Chariho, and we were all talking about it. Deborah A Gist is my facebook profile. On Twitter, it is Deborah Gist.

The testing on special education, I know for sure that two of the things that are going to be part of the reauthorized - is that how we handle special education and how we handle English language learners. I think everybody acknowledges that there are some flaws in the law that just aren't quite right. The purpose was to say that we have high expectations for all students and that we don't want people to write them off and say that we don't have expectations for them. At the same time, we have to be realistic. So that is something I know will be addressed here. We don't have the option right now unless we have the option to have a gap test.

Linda Filomeno: We do not. The way that it is set up is everybody can opt out their "1% kids". "One percent" kids can have the alternate assessments, But in other States, they have created a gap test for the kids, the "2% ". They are failing. We do not have a test for the "2%" in Rhode Island, we only have the "1%". This is two years overdue for us, and for us, it is a major issue.

The Secretary of Education gave a speech last week on getting the ball rolling on that communication. It will be awhile however we should talk in the mean time about opting our 2%.

On diplomas, I would like to follow up with you on that because I hear that and I have heard that message in other communities as well. Interestingly, I have sat on and then was advised by the State's Advisory Council for Special Education in Washington DC and the parents on my panel were very, very leery of an alternative for the same fear that I was talking about with testing. Which is if that alternative exists, they were worried that then people would say that your child cannot graduate. So it is finding that balance but how do you have an alternative for the situations where it is truly an alternative is needed without having to do it, if people really invested in the child that they could actually achieve it. I really want to continue that conversation and figure out what the right solution is for Rhode Island.

This topic really hasn't come up but I think another thing is alternatives for students. Multiple pathways, whether it is because of a newcomer to the country or a child who wants or needs to work or just the traditional school structure doesn't really work out, or whatever it is. In fact, one of the things that I have been so excited about is the e-Learning. I have been, I keep saying Woonsocket, Woonsocket, so I am looking forward to my visit while hearing more about what's happening with e-Learning in the district. That is something that I am very, very interested in.

This has been very helpful.

Anita McGuire-Forcier: One more question about children falling through the cracks. Many parents do not know how to advocate for their children and they're falling through the cracks and the teachers don't have the right legally to pursue children being tested without parent permission and sometimes they don't have the knowledge enough to know that their child needs to be tested. I think we have to make sure that every child whatever it is preventing them from achieving at the levels that we expect, whether if it is because there is a special need that hasn't been identified or whatever other problem we can't get a handle on, so the whole purpose of some of the things that need to be put in place, like individual learning plans, like NECAP testing, those kind of things, the whole purpose for those are to try to prevent that. Then the question is, are those the right things, how do we better use them?

In one of the other districts they do not use NECAP, they actually use their formative assessment but if the student falls more than 8 months behinds then there is intervention needed whatever the district has in place to make sure that the student does not fall between the cracks.

Cindy Stepanian: What can we do as parents, community members or agencies, to support you and support the education of our kids?

This is where the communication piece becomes important. As the strategic agenda gets built for you to see it, develop it, give feedback, have a chance to follow it, I am going to make that a very public document. I am going to make really, really clear what I am saying, that I am going to get done each of the next three years. So there will be things that I will need your help with especially when it will require legislative changes because we will need to have an active voice for those things. Even the things I have the authority to change, some people are really going to push against. Whether it is at the Board of Regents meetings, hearings, or just the court of public opinion, like when your neighbor hears some story in the paper that who knows where they come from sometimes but they are saying “Hey, did you hear about that horrible commissioner. She is trying to do this and that.” If you are on the list serve you actually have the information and you can say well that is interesting and we should provide that feedback. Continual feedback on how things are going, keeps me both accountable but also on track. Thank you.

Meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Kimberly Blais

Attachment