

WEST HAVEN BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES
January 3, 2011
Education Reform, Innovation & New Grant Monies Committee Meeting

The Education Reform, Innovation & New Grant Monies Committee Meeting Committee Meeting of the Board of Education was held in the City Council Chambers in City Hall, 255 Main Street, West Haven, CT on January 3, 2011. The meeting was called to order by Howard Horvath, Chairman of this Committee at 6:35 p.m. The meeting opened with a pledge to the flag.

BOARD MEMBERS

IN ATTENDANCE:

Howard Horvath Jr., Chairman
Dorinda Borer
Eric Murillo
Robert Saley
T. Sean Maher
Patrick Egolum
M. Toni Paine
Mark Palmieri
Andrew DePalma

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT: Neil Cavallaro, Superintendent of Schools
Dave Cappetta, Director of Finance

CITY OFFICIALS PRESENT:

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES
PRESENT:**

Chairman Howard Horvath thanked everyone for coming to the inaugural Education Reform, Innovation & New Grant Monies sub committee (ERIN). In tonight's meeting we will talk about some things in particular that we could focus on and find out what other members of the committee might recommend that we focus on relative to the categories of reform, innovation and new grant monies. He started with a quote that reminded him of the good work that we have seen unfolding here relative to reform in this district under Neil, Anne and Patti Fusco's leadership and all the department heads.

“To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear – the daily habits, tools, loyalties and ways of thinking – with nothing to offer perhaps than a possibility.” (Heifetz & Linsky 2002 p.2)

Chairman Horvath stated that he knows the work we have done so far with CALI in particular has been really phenomenal and exactly what we need to be doing and I think that is a great lead into the kinds of things we can complement with this group.

The other thing I think we should note relative to this is having restructured the schools really was a major change not only just to the way people get to and from schools on the busses but also by bringing all the teachers from one particular grade 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th together with all these additional resources and focus and I had the pleasure of walking through both Bailey and Carrigan about a week ago and it was just amazing to me to see that level of energy, excitement, and diversity; it was just very exciting to me. What impressed me the most in talking with some of the teachers they stated in my last school which was comfortable quite a few years I had one or two go to people now I have three, four and five go to people. This is an amazing team and I think this is a credit and of real value to what we have done so far and I want us to realize that work also represents what I consider both challenging, innovative and in line with reform.

The other thing I want to preface this with and I said this when I was first elected chairman that we really only are going to go as far as our teachers take us and that is no disrespect to our administrators, the leadership, or the board but at the end of the day all the research tells us that the quality of the teacher in the classroom; what happens in that classroom matters the most. That is what will really help ensure that these students get a great education and that we as a district move forward into the 21st Century with much more success than we have left behind us. He wanted to take his hat off again to the effort that the teachers have put into implementing CALI and just generally being there for our students in this district. He gave a quick quote from Charlotte Danielson. "Schools are complex systems with many moving parts such as the richness of the curriculum, the general tone of the school and the availability of support services in extra-curricular activities for students. However, in spite of these factors the single most important factor under the control of the school in influencing the degree of student learning is the quality of the teaching; thus a school or I would say a district or board committed to improving the quality of learning must be equally committed to improving the quality of teaching." Chairman Horvath thinks that is right on as well. He doesn't think it is all that complex but it most certainly is difficult. We know it is hard to move the dial and I just wanted to preface it with that because I think ultimately what we do to support our teachers and what we do with our teachers and administrators is going to return the most to our students and ultimately to our district. Chairman Horvath's understanding of reform and the strategies that he has seen out there are that they come at it in two different ways. One is this concept of an inside out so what happens in that classroom between the teacher, the student and the content that interaction is really going to be the key to moving the dial and I think that is incredibly true and that is what I was just alluding to. There is also the thought that you can do some really good reform work from the outside in - in changing structures so an extended day I'm not suggesting that is what we are doing here or suggesting we do here but that is one of the primary approaches to improving student achievement; extending the day, extending the school year you know a couple of weeks of summer school. Many of us had the pleasure I know Eric Murillo and Rob Saley did at the very beginning of the year we went with Neil, Anne, Pam Gardner and Patti Fusco over to Amistad in New Haven to take a look at one of the most successful charter school networks in the country right here in our backyard to see what they were doing and how they were doing it. I really appreciated the fact that we were able to get as large a group as we did to go to understand what they are doing. We saw some things that were different. They started the day by getting everybody together in the gymnasium and talked about what had been achieved that week or that previous day and what was on the schedule going forward. They had students presenting out to all these other students and adults and it was pretty impressive. I bring it up in part because that is another example of some possibilities but that was something we did almost a year ago and really didn't report out about it and I really want to do that kind of update to the board or reporting out to the board in this venue going forward.

My thought is there are a lot of things going on out there relative to reform and strategies and interventions and we have a lot of expertise in the room here about that but I wanted to see what based on the conversations you might have had or what you have seen in the paper you all think about the areas of reform you want to address where that might be important. This is not binding let's just have a kind of brainstorm for the next five or ten minutes.

Rob Saley asked if he could talk about old grant money not just new grant money. He could do that. Rob said he mentioned a couple of months ago that in addition to all the money we receive from the taxpayers, our ECS grants and all the other grant money that we do get is probably the most important thing going forward. What I would like to see is to have our grant team and maybe the city's grant team come in and at least discuss with us the opportunities available. I know Governor Molloy will speak on Wednesday and I think we are not going to get everything but I think that he will be telling us the cupboard is bare and that we will struggle for the next couple of years on what we have and obviously there is grant money and when I read in the paper that Mr. Gates and his wife give out a lot of money whether it is to private or public schools I'm not 100% sure but those are some sizeable monies that I think would be good for us to at least pursue and I would really like to see our grant team come in and explain to us how this is done; what grants we have applied for, because we have an eclectic group of people in this education system and maybe they know of other grants that can be pursued. When I read the article I was a little upset because our Superintendent had that idea about a year in a half ago when Madison and Guilford put the solar panels on and how they said they have a dial in the school and I know we have had that conversation and that is something I would love to see because it is a science and technology thing and the Superintendent said it is a gauge in the school that says every time someone walks by we are saving X amount of electricity and we are not putting X amount of carbon in and it kind of gets people's interest going. Those are secondary grants in my opinion but they are something especially when you look at science overall in the country that is something that is evolving now and it would be great if we could get something similar to that. I would like to see us do a little bit more and have the grant team come in and discuss this at the next meeting or prior to our budget if we could do this.

Neil Cavallaro stated that Paul Sullivan is the new State Grant Director and has made an effort to come over and meet with us and has sent us some things we sent out to various people who might be interested. Perhaps I can invite him to come to one of our meetings. He has expressed an interest to work with us. Rob said that would be great and thanked Neil.

Howard Horvath said that sounds like a great idea he thinks while there is a shortage of money fundamentally because of the federal grants and support of education and reform really has been funded like no other time in history. There are some grants that we could and should pursue.

Dorinda said you mentioned that the teachers are going to be a big part of this and we will have them share this vision what conversations have taken place with the union leadership about ideas for reform to date between either you or the superintendent. Have we had any? Howie said we have had some preliminary conversation that have been kind of delayed in part because of the contract negotiations and so I think that real conversations are yet to come. Dorinda said everything we read regarding Chancellor Rhee is that she continues to say that her lesson is learned or that they didn't bring the teachers in early on and that they came up with reform and then just kind of handed it to them and had an adversarial relationship and the mayor lost the primary as a result and then she resigned so we know what happened there and then in New Haven on the panel discussion that the New Haven Independent and WTNH had about a month ago had the panel of union leaders, Dr. Mayo, Mayor John DeStefano and they talked about the differences between charter schools, public schools and private schools and what worked and

what they think has been successful in their reform. They said the key for them was the labor management being cooperative also. They felt that was one thing they did different than California and Washington and it was very important. So I think we should take some lessons learned from those states and cities who have moved forward already and possibly bring the union in on the discussions early on maybe parallel to this committee have some sort of labor management committee where we can share ideas so that that we can see what they are thinking and talk about it openly.

Howie said sure he would take that into consideration. His understanding of Washington is it was less about the union. Initially the union just would not listen to anything and just said forget it. Over time and with more money offered they finally said OK and Randy Weingarten stepped in. What I think that Michelle Rhee said is it was her lack of communication to the parents. In other words they were closing down schools which we went though and you saw the kind of concern that generates so they never took the time to explain what was going on in that area and didn't take the time to promote the reforms they were implementing were for this reason and they were going to benefit the students in this way. I personally, immediately reached out to the union to talk about it for 12 months but I think the Washington DC story was really about not communicating with the families and had more to do with the fact that they were closing schools. Dorinda said they let a lot of teachers go unexpectedly and I think they let almost 200 go and that obviously caused someHowie interjected I think that was a good lesson she came in with a lot of power and was able to wield it. We will get the conversation going I agree with that.

Dorinda stated she is curious as to how our Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent feel about the flux on reform because obviously they are our leadership and we need to know what their thoughts are. Dorinda didn't know if they were prepared to discuss this now or at a later meeting as she didn't want to put them on the spot but would like to hear from them.

Neil said we feel like we have a good plan in place for reform it is a five year plan that we are now two years into. We have reformed our curriculum, we have trained all our teachers and certainly there is more work to be done. Howie and I have talked and we would like to work on a new evaluation plan with the teachers. We would like to have them be part of the discussion. We had those initial conversations and I think there is certainly a need to do things sooner rather than later unfortunately the thing that may hold us back although I think we can overcome it is the financial condition not only of the city but of the state I think that may hinder us a little bit but I think we have taken some good steps and are on the right track to take the next step.

Anne Druzolowski said absolutely we have gone through this process very thoughtfully and teachers are on board and supporting it and moving forward. It is not going to show immediate results it is something that is sustainable however within the district and will be over with in five years and it has already been proven in other districts so I think we are well on our way to finessing everything we are doing and improving the quality of instruction in the classroom. Dollars are always of concern and our demographics continue to change and this is not an excuse we must know that resources will become critical and to make sure we use them regardless of the new agendas. The new evaluation as mentioned is critical. It is critical we have one in place but right at this point until we have everybody where we need to have them having an evaluation is kind of shooting ourselves in the foot at this point but has to be done and is something that has to be very thoughtfully planned and I think that is what we have talked about in the past. Dorinda said so we should start the discussion about the evaluation now but you think it is a little too early to implement. Anne would say definitely not now for implementation as we are in the middle of the school year. We have planned on having that conversation and it usually takes a good community group to work through what that looks like and teachers have to be involved in that

discussion as well as union representation and administrators and that is for the administrative end of the evaluation as well. There are two big pieces here and until you know what quality teaching looks like in the district it is very difficult to set a value rating. I think everybody is invested in making West Haven the best it can be and that is our next step and I just want to give it a little more time and I have been pretty vocal about that I have just been pulling back the reins a little because I tend to do things very quickly as teachers know but this is one thing that we need to start conversations about it. Neil said the negotiations and arbitration going the full length with the teachers certainly slowed us down a little bit and we need to revive those conversations.

Dorinda asked if they envision that the biggest part of the reform is the evaluation. Howie said from his perspective it is. I think it is not just an evaluation it really is an evaluation and development support system. That at the end of the day is really what you need; a student needs support and teachers need support. He passed out some information. This is just to point out that West Haven is not alone in struggling academically. As a country these are the results of 15 year old students in an international test that is done every four or five years called the Programme for International Student Assessment. It shows us that unfortunately in reading we are 14th in the world, in science we are 17th and in math we are 25th with quite a few countries between us and the top where we used to be. It is not just a local problem it is an international or national problem and it is hard work. It is part of what is behind the fact that the President and the Secretary of Education have invested so much time, energy and money in trying to make some reforms happen.

One of my New Year's resolutions was to re-read the bi-laws again and I just wanted to point out that this is one of the legal responsibilities of our board #23 down below in particular states we are required to submit to the Commissioner of Education and the State Board of Education every five years in a manner prescribed by the Commissioner *b. (2) a five year plan for the ongoing and systematic assessment and improvement of teacher evaluation and professional development related to student needs. I would like to respectfully suggest that we do start that conversation, engage the union and administrators so that we can meet that particular bi-law and start to get a feel for what this thing might look like going forward.

Dorinda asked if we can do this in a more formalized process where we take recommendations from the board as to who from the administration is on the committee and hear some input from the union and set up a schedule and put some structure to it so it is not loose with the union talking to Neil and Neil talking to you and we all will be included and we know what is going on and everybody will have a channel and opportunity to voice their opinion. Howie thought that was a good idea.

Toni Paine's thoughts were that she knows there is a plan in place and it is under the union contract as to how evaluation will be done and she doesn't think we can do anything formally. To have conversations would be fine and dandy. This is so true the bi-laws of the board's legal responsibilities we also have at the beginning of our bi-laws a very important part that says we shall not micro-manage and we shall be someone who is a policy making board and I would kind of listen to the people who we have put in power. I think at this point it would behoove us if we want to talk about it talk about it but I don't think we are at a point right now where we can make definitive rules and regulations when we really don't know what you are striving towards. She read about CAFE three or four weeks ago and CAFE is definitely saying don't do anything now and this is an organization we pay money to. To talk about it and anything you discuss and to learn more about it would be good for us but you know....Howie stated let me answer that. He talked to CAFE and they are on a panel to help evaluate or to come up with an evaluation system but they are all for us going forward; in fact they sent me a note here identifying and kind of lauding three other districts that are going ahead and doing it now so they are of the mind that

this is a good thing. Like you said we are not going to try and micro-manage this; this is really about a policy. We need to think about writing a policy. It is my understanding I'm not the lawyer but teacher evaluation really isn't in the contract the only thing that is in the contract after having studied it for a month when we were negotiating it was that tenured teachers could only be evaluated formally every three years so that needs to be factored in. What I'm thinking about only affects a certain percentage of teachers initially so that is why you need to have the kind of conversation. The actual evaluation and how it's done that's a function of what we ultimately can decide together as a group and put into policy with the administration. Let's start the conversation let's get real about it and formalize it and see what we can do. I'm of the mind if we are seven years in need of improvement let's not go into eight. We don't have time to waste. Our kids are sitting there looking to get out of that mode and into a more successful mode and the longer we wait the longer they ultimately pay that price and that is my opinion on that. We are right at time so we will have more of these meetings and I think first on the docket would be that maybe the members of this committee can think about who they would recommend in terms of being on a panel like that and a formal structure and then we will do that as one of the agenda items next time.

Dorinda thinks that evaluation is just one piece of it and before we can engage in evaluation discussions we have to figure out how to define success because before we can talk about how to change any evaluation process we have to determine together what we want to see come out of our district; come up with our goals. Howie said we have some goals I don't disagree with that but at the end of the day I think you all agree that we want to get out of in need of improvement. Look there are 169 districts and I want to say 18 of them or maybe 44 of them are in need of improvement. I haven't looked at the numbers lately so I may be a little off but 18 of them have been in 7 consecutive years and we are one of them. I think we need to start thinking about, just as we have, let's be honest CALI is a difficult program that I believe strongly in as does the Assistant Superintendent. I think it would have gone very slowly if she had not realized how important it is and fought hard to implement it sooner rather than later for the benefit of our children and they are the better for it. The negotiated contract we just did with teachers; Neil and Floyd did a masterful job of putting that together; it wasn't pleasant there are a lot of savings for the taxpayer but there is a lot of burden now for the teachers. You could have stopped and said well we really don't want to have them bear this kind of burden. You could just say we won't do that but we had to go ahead and do what we could to make these next few years workable. This is in that same category we could sit and wait and wait and just kick it down the road but if we want to see the benefits sooner rather than later then we need to act.

Rob Saley said when he looks at the education reform, innovation and new grant monies you are discussing obviously evaluations for teachers which under principal is part of reform but there are a lot of other facets that are a part of that and I think the best thing for us to do as a board is to come up with what we personally feel are reforms in the education system; is it teacher evaluation, is it a longer school day, is it charter school and to come up with a list and sit down with the teachers and discuss those things and see where we are and see what we would like to do and have their views. To me it is not just evaluation. Howie said let me just try and stop you there it is evaluation and development. If it is one and not the other it is not going to be valuable; it is not going to work. Secondly and I meant to open this up to everybody early to say what are the ideas you might have about this because I think there is a long list. Rob said absolutely. Howie stated he happens to have some ideas about what he thinks are most important but others might think otherwise and/or want to add to the list. There is a long list of things people are doing to try and get themselves out of the place that they are at to a better place. Rob said so how do we start this going other than this meeting. Howie said the two things I would like to do next is think about what you suggested relative to getting a formalized group together and start the conversation and I will make an effort by the next time we have a meeting to come up with a long list of

the different things over and above the things we have talked about tonight that represent school reform and innovation. Rob said I think it would be beneficial if we all did this. Howie stated everybody can come up with it but what I'm saying is a starter and I'll pass it around and add to it at will. I think the point you are making is let's get it all on the table and think it through and then back to your point about ultimately needs to fit in as a part of the whole puzzle; CALI can't sit by itself. You have to think about the goals; where we are headed to, what we want to do, the plan to get there and if this is an important piece then we want to take action and if we think it is not then we don't. Dorinda said just to clarify I thought maybe it would be an opportunity to brainstorm on any ideas on reforms not a formalized committee on evaluation because we need the union to come forward or the teachers or any employees to come forward and say here are my ideas of what I have seen work and what is not working and here are some thoughts. Rob said that is what he just said. Howie said we are in agreement. It is now 7:05 and we will close this meeting. Rob made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Patrick seconded the motion. All were in favor the meeting adjourned at 7:05 and there was a 5 minute break before the board meeting began.

Respectfully submitted,

Marylou C. Amendola
Board Secretary