

**CITY OF NORWALK
EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 10, 2010**

ATTENDANCE: Betsy Bain, Chair; Mary Budrawich, NPS Early Childhood Specialist; Annie Alvarez, Norwalk Hospital Women's and Children's Services; Lauriston Avery, Five Mile River Nursery School Director; Hyla Crane, Stepping Stones Director of Education; Cathy DeCesare, United Way Coastal Fairfield County; Adele Gordon, Norwalk Smiles Director; Dr. Sally Grose, Community Representative; George Hensinger, Community Representative; Curtis Law, Norwalk Housing Authority Director; Ed Musante, Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce President; Marie Angie Nicolas, NCC Parent Representative; Joan Parris, NCC Early Childhood Program Director; Betsy Perry, Mid Fairfield Child Guidance Center; Victoria Schilling, NHD Norwalk Healthy Families Collaboration Representative; Jo-Ann Stabler, NEON Head Start Program Director

STAFF: Barbara Smart, NECC; Rosalie Witt

OTHERS: Mary Windt, Under One Roof; Sonja Ahuja, Graustein Memorial Fund; Marlene DeBellis, Side by Side School and F.R.C.

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bain called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. She announced that the Mayor would be coming to the meeting a bit later. Also the current Interim Superintendent will be stopping by to sit on the meeting if possible.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2010
AND FEBRUARY 4, 2010.**

January 13, 2010

**** MS. GORDON MOVED THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2010**

The following corrections were noted:

Page 1, under **OTHERS**, please add "Mary Windt, Under One Roof"

Page 4, paragraph 4, line 2: please change “receive funds from the program.” To “receive funds for the program.”

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 4, 2010 MEETING AS CORRECTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

February 4, 2010

**** MR. LAW MOVED THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 4, 2010.**

The following corrections were noted:

Page 3, paragraph 4, line 4: please change “the Office of Early Childhood Education” to “the Municipal Office of Early Childhood Education”

Page 3, paragraph 5, line 2: please change “Mr. Haselkamp” to “Mr. Hensinger”

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 4, 2010 MEETING AS CORRECTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Hensinger said that there was an update on the monthly report of activities on the Council, which stated that the Mayor’s intention to separate the Early Childhood from the Youth Service Department. This was incorrect.

UPDATE – GRANTS

A. School Readiness Grant policy - first policy

Ms. Bain said that the RFP has been issued by the state and the providers are in the process of completing the applications. Part of the process is that the Council needs to adopt a policy regarding the family fees.

Mayor Moccia joined the meeting at 9:45 a.m.

Ms. Bain said that the Council would now move to the discussion with the Mayor.

DISCUSSION WITH MAYOR AND SUPERINTENDENT

Let it be noted that all comments by the various speakers are summarized and not necessarily verbatim

The Mayor said that there have been changes in the budget, he said that he wanted to insure that the Early Childhood Development was protected in Youth Services. He said

that there were concerns about reporting to the Mayor. He said that the Youth Services Department already reports to the Mayor. He said that he can't speak for future mayors, but that he felt that his major concern was that there was an experienced staff member to administer the grant funding. He said that he wants to insure that there was a place in the budget for this grant because the budget process starts in September. He said that he believed that the Early Childhood Specialist will be maintained in the budget. He said that he appreciated everyone's concerns.

Ms. Bain said that she appreciated the Mayor coming to the meeting and asked if there was anyone who had questions and comments. She added that the BOE was working closely with the City Administration on several issues, including the upcoming selection of a new Superintendent.

The Mayor said that when he had the opportunity to speak with the candidate for Superintendent, one of the first issues he mentioned was Early Childhood. He said that he believed that the candidate would be a good fit and would advocate for the students in Norwalk. He said that he appreciated being part of the Superintendent Selection Committee because it helped to be involved.

The Mayor said that he was sorry for being late in getting the information to the Council, but there were numerous issues on the plate.

Ms. DeCesear said that one issue that came up was that the Council needed to improve their communication with the Mayor. She then asked how to improve this. The Mayor said that he had confidence in the Council and was please that the number of slots increasing. He said that if the Council wanted to have more communications with him, he would accept the

Dr. Grose asked what position is it for the Early Childhood Specialist? Mayor said that someone is needed to manage the grants and also to coordinate the activities with the Council. He added that he would be open to more guidance to what the Mayor could be doing with the State. He said that the most important issue would be having someone who would work with his office as a liaison.

Ms. Budrawich said that the job title would also be the Early Childhood Coordinator, and the Mayor agreed. Ms. Bain then said that there was a need to bring the two entities of the City and the District together and hope that this position would do that.

The Mayor said that the Marketing Director reports to directly to him, as does the Grants Coordinator. By having this relationship with these two key people, he is aware of concerns.

Ms. Windt asked if there was an idea of how this position would monitor the School Readiness and possibly a push for someone to replace the Early Childhood Special. The Mayor said that there needs to be coordination between the District and the Administration. The Mayor said that things are still unclear as to how this will all be handled in terms of Youth Services and how it will be organized at this point in time.

Ms. Ahuja, from the Graustein Memorial fund, asked if there was a process for the communication and how the Council could participate in the budget process. The Mayor said that the Youth Services will be considered separately from the Early Childhood, due to union contracts and other factors. Ms. Windt said that there has to be someone to work full time on School Readiness issues. Ms. Bain said that a job description needs to be developed so that the coordination can be facilitated. She then asked where the Council will be positioned in the overall plan. The Mayor said that the communication between the Early Childhood, School Readiness and the District is a priority.

Ms. Budrawich said that the reason this was so critical in writing what the next action plan because the current one expires in 2010. She then said that the Council needs to consider what the components in the job description, so that the Council can make the recommendation to the Mayor's office for evaluation. The Graustein plan had a tentative outline, but the conversation needs to be finalized.

Ms. Avery said that she had concerns about the fact that the Superintendent of Schools has not been in attendance in the meeting and she wondered how the staff complimented one another in terms of feeding the students to the school system.

Ms. Parris asked about the data person continuing in the budget. Ms. Bain said that the funds for the analysis/planner will end and a new Early Childhood Coordinator would be created with aspects of the analysis/planner's position. The responsibilities for data and other information would be spread over a broader group of people.

The Mayor said that he wanted to reach out to other towns to see what they are doing. He said that if everything is clarified, the administration could start looking to fill the position. Ms. Bain said that Norwalk is very lucky in that it has the active concern from the elected leader of the city.

Mayor Moccia left the meeting at 10:15 a.m.

A. SCHOOL READINESS GRANT POLICY - FIRST POLICY CONT'D

Ms. Budrawich then said that Norwalk was directed by the State to look at the fees and policies because of an issue that had arisen. Ms. Budrawich then reviewed the previous family fee practices with those present. The reconsideration that the State is allowing for PO-09-03 (Program Operations 09-03) is that the family rule will remain. Ms. Smart

distributed copies of the updated policy statement with the changes indicated by italics in number 3 and 4.

Ms. Bain said that this was for everyone to consider and would be voted on in May. Ms. Paul said that the providers were in favor of these changes. She then asked about the fact that if a family pays the full fee, the client does not have to disclose their income. Ms. Budrawich confirmed this. Discussion about the details then followed, including a brief discussion about siblings being enrolled in programs with different providers.

Dr. Grose and Ms. Perry left the meeting at 10:30 a.m.

Ms. Bain announced that Ms. Konn-Andrait had resigned her positions on the Council because she has changed jobs.

B. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT GRANT

Ms. Budrawich then gave a quick overview of the QE budget, which includes items such as presenters, Building Bridges, clerical support, mental health prevention, technical assistance for support of School Readiness programs, tuition reimbursement for Early Childhood providers and other categories. Ms. Bain said that the Steering committee had

Ms. Budrawich said that by September at the latest, the leadership team needs to evaluate the budget in terms of the new action plan that is developed.

**** MS. BUDRAWICH MOVED TO HAVE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT GRANT BUDGET BE SUBMITTED AS IT STANDS TO MEET THE MAY 20TH DEADLINE WITH A REVIEW NO LATER THAN SEPTEMBER 30TH TO INSURE THAT IT MATCHES THE NEW ACTION PLAN.**

**** MR. LAW SECONDED.**

Mr. Hensinger asked about Kith and Kin. Ms. Budrawich said that the program would continue.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

C. Graustein Grant – formal endorsement of grant

Ms. Bain said that the application was submitted to the Graustein Memorial Fund on February 26th.

**** MS. PAUL MOVED TO FORMAL ENDORSE THE GRANT APPLICATION THAT WAS SUBMITTED TO THE GRAUSTEIN MEMORIAL FUND ON FEBRUARY 26TH.**

**** MS. PARRIS SECONDED.**

Ms. Budrawich said that if the motion is approved, she wished to underscore that the approval does not mean that what was submitted was subject to approval by the Council in terms of the Action Plan. Items such as the composition of the Steering committee were still open for discussion. A decision will not be given until after April 17th. The Council can continue to update Graustein on any changes. Ms. Bain said that it was important to have this as a collaborative process.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

OTHER UPDATES

Ms. Bain said that the United Way would be issuing an RFP in the near future. She said that the work on filling out the application form for Graustein grant was very intense. She said that the City Grant Writer, Katherine Pylesky was willing to work with the Early Childhood Council on this. More discussions need to take place about this. Ms. Bain then gave a brief outline of how the United Way funds might be used.

As a result of conversation and requests for an expanse of Steering Committee. Both Ms. Paul and Ms. Schilling will be joining the Steering Committee. Ms. Sadlon asked about the appointments to the Steering Committee as outlined in the Council bylaws. Ms. Bain then reviewed these with those present. Ms. Sadlon asked that copies of the by-laws be sent out electronically for review. Discussion then followed about establishing priorities. Ms. Bain said that she would like copies of the management structure to be distributed also.

Ms. Bain said that she felt that the discussion should move to what the next steps would be. Ms. Sadlon said that the other towns had the data in a much firmer form. Ms. Sadlon said that she had attended a number of data driven decision making courses and that third grade reading scores is tied to the early childhood experiences. Ms. Budrawich said that the Council had created a great action plan for its day, but now it was time to work on the next edition. Discussion followed about the use of data.

Mr. Hensinger then spoke about the recent Early Childhood Cabinet meeting and said that the Superintendent from Bloomfield felt that the Kindergarten Screening was useless. Ms. Budrawich said that she hoped the Council would challenge themselves with making sense of conflicting data.

Ms. Bain said that it would be important to discuss how to break down into groups to determine the strategies and develop recommendations to the Mayor. She then gave several examples of how this might be done and the resources available.

Ms. Sadlon said that she had gone on the Discovery website for Norwalk and found a significant amount of data there. She said that it would be important for the Council to discuss the impact of the data, such as the fact that there is a significant percentage of mothers who were not high school graduates. This is because Norwalk has a high percentage of immigrants from countries where finishing high school is difficult, not because of teen pregnancies. She recommended that the Council members have some training in analyzing data. Ms. Witt commented that it would be important for the Council to decide what aspect of the data they were interested in. Ms. Budrawich said that the important part was who would make the decisions on what actions to take.

Ms. Schilling said that there had been discussions in the past about having a consultant. Ms. Bain asked if the Council wanted the Steering Committee to explore

**** MR. LAW TO MOVE CHARGE THE STEERING COMMITTEE TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF HIRING A CONSULTANT TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW ACTION PLAN AND ADDRESS THE CONCERNS RAISED IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS.**

**** MS. PAUL SECONDED.**

Ms. DeCesare pointed out that the Council knows how to do an action plan and felt that the consultant would be more towards facilitating the process. Ms. Witt pointed out that there was a timeline attached to the application to the Graustein Memorial fund and asked if anyone had comments.

Ms. Ahuja said that there was a list of consultants who are intended as process consultants, who help with committee planning and help with other operational concerns that need attention. She then recommended the “Insider’s Guide to Outsider’s Advice”, which contains protocols and questions that the council would need to consider.

Ms. DeCesare said that she was concerned that the motion used the word “explore” .

Ms. Budrawich said that the motion could be amended to “Charged to engage a consultant” because it was the general feeling of the Council that they needed expert advice.

**** MS. DECESARE MOVE TO AMEND TO CHARGE THE STEERING COMMITTEE TO SELECT A CONSULTANT TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW ACTION PLAN AND ADDRESS THE CONCERNS RAISED IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS.**

**** MS. PAUL SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

A. FRC Yale study

Ms. Sadlon said that the Yale Center had completed a study on Family Resource Centers and she had copies of the Executive Summary of the study for those who might be interested.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Sadlon said that she had copies of a flyer on “Growing A Successful Family Day Care Business” which she then distributed to those present.

Mr. Hensinger said that he had an update on Care for Kids and the program will remain open until the end of the year. By announcing that the program would be closed too quickly, the State came up short in terms of effort and the State will have to return 13 million dollars in ARRA funding to the Federal government. The eligibility requirements are still in effect. The Care for Kids administration is looking for eligible families to maintain the funding.

Ms. Schilling said that there would be a Statewide recognition of the Child First program replication on March 24th at Hartford. Ms. Schilling said that she was coordinating the Child First team under the Child First Grant.

Ms. DeCesare said that the new Health Center will be opened on April 24th.

Ms. Paul said that the School Readiness providers voted that a proportional amount of the \$25,000. Ms. Budrawich said that Ms. Smart had gotten an answer from the State regarding approval for a lesser amount. The process for distribution was then discussed, along with giving up capacity and how that would be viewed in Hartford.

GOOD NEWS

In the fall, Norwalk Hospital opened a pediatric sub specialist center.

Ms. Hyla Crane announced that Stepping Stones was celebrating its 13th birthday and there would be free admission on March 13, 2010.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. LAW MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

