

**CITY OF NORWALK
HEALTH, WELFARE & PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE OF THE COMMON
COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
DECEMBER 7, 2015**

ATTENDANCE: Faye Bowman, Chair; Eloisa Melendez; Steve Serasis; Richard Bonenfant; Nick Sacchinelli; Michael De Palma; Michelle Maggio (7:20 PM)

WELCOME AND ROLL CALL

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No one from the public wished to speak.

NEW BUSINESS

ACTION ITEM

1. Approve 2016 Calendar

The Chair stated that the proposed meeting time will be the 4th Thursday of every month. She asked if anyone had issue with this timing. Mr. Bonenfant stated that he had no issue, but they likely would have to work around the last two meetings of the year, given their placement during the holiday season.

**** MS. MELENDEZ MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2016 CALENDAR.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

DISCUSSION ITEM

1. NHA Head Start Update

The Chair stated that they made a point during the last term to expedite the process and ensure Head Start had a home. She stated that they want to get to the bottom of the program's core

issues, and discuss how they can fix them and prevent those issues from happening again. The Chair stated that Mrs. Oster would be asked to speak to the item, followed by the Norwalk Housing Authority.

Mrs. Oster, Early Childhood Coordinator for the City, came forward and gave the following presentation, whose materials read as follows:

Infant/Toddler and Preschool Enrollment in Norwalk Sites receiving State and Federal Funding

Total Enrollment: 1,017

Total Sites: 14

Brookside Elementary School, Carousel Preschool, Children's Playhouse, Children's Playhouse Too, Fox Run/ELLI, Growing Seeds, L'il Critters Preschool, Naramake Preschool (at Norwalk High School), Norwalk Community College, Norwalk Housing Authority- Ben Franklin and Nathaniel Ely, Room to Grow, Room to Grow 2, The Marvin

Funding Streams

A. School Readiness

- Preschool (3 and 4 year olds)
- Funding comes through the state of Connecticut to Norwalk Public Schools
- Sliding Fee Scale- 60% of families served by each program must fall below the state's median income
- Families must live in Norwalk (there is a 2% set aside 12 spots for non-residents who work or go to school in Norwalk)
- No work requirements for parents
- Slots are allocated to the 14 sites listed above

B. Child Day Care Contract

- Infant/Toddler, Preschool and Head Start Wraps (makes the 6-hour HS ay a 10-hour day for working parents)
- Funding comes from the federal Childcare and Development Block Grant (CCDGB), through the state of Connecticut to Norwalk
- City holds contract, NHS is sub-contractor
- Sliding Fee Scale- family income must be less than 75% of the state's median income guideline
- No residency requirement however, the majority of families live in Norwalk
- 80% of families in this funding stream must be working
- Slots only at Ben Franklin and Nathaniel Ely

C. Head Start

- Preschool (3 and 4 year olds)

- Federally funded
- Based on family income- must be at or below poverty level, 6-hour program is available at no cost
- Slots only at Ben Franklin and Ely

D. Care 4 Kids

- Makes childcare affordable to low and middle income families
- Funding comes from State of Connecticut
- Parents must be working or going to school (approved program)
- Provider can be a childcare center, family daycare or relative
- All School Readiness sites including NHA take Care4Kids
- Care4Kids determines amount that provider will be reimbursed

Total Toddler and Preschool Enrollment- Norwalk 14 Funded Sites

- Infant/Toddler
 - CDC Funded: 56
 - Total: 56
- Preschool
 - CDC Funded: 43
 - Head Start: 140
 - School Readiness: 602
 - Total: 785
- Total: 841

Norwalk Housing Authority

- Toddler and Preschool Enrollment- Norwalk Housing Authority

A. Ben Franklin

- a. CDC Funded Toddler: 16
- b. CDC Funded Preschool: 11
- c. School Readiness: 37
- d. Head Start: 70
- e. Total: 134

B. Nathaniel Ely

- a. CDC Funded Toddler: 40
- b. CDC Funded Preschool: 32
- c. School Readiness: 119
- d. Head Start: 90
- e. Total: 281

C. Total

- a. CDC Funded Toddler: 56

- b. CDC Funded Preschool: 43
- c. School Readiness: 156
- d. Head Start: 160
- e. Total: 415

- Childcare Funding Streams- Norwalk Housing Authority

- A. Head Start
 - a. # of slots: 160
 - b. Type of Slot: Preschool
 - c. Funding: \$1,200,000
- B. School Readiness
 - a. # of slots: 156
 - b. Type of Slot: Preschool
 - c. Funding: \$1,393,000
- C. Child Day Care- CDC, Child Care and Development Block Grant, Federal to State to City. Contract between the city and NHA.
 - a. # of slots: Toddler (56); Preschool (43); Wraps* (114- not included in the total, wrap HS slots)
 - b. Type of Slot: Infant/Toddler Preschool
 - c. Funding: \$1,456,753
- D. Total
 - a. # of slots: 415
 - b. Funding: \$4,049,753**

* Wraps extend the 6-hour Federal Head Start day to 10 hours. The CDC wrap also extends the slots to full year from the Head Start 40-week year. Because the wraps extend existing Head Start slots the 114 are not included in the total number of slots.

** CHEFA (Connecticut Health & Education Facilities Authority) estimates the cost of high quality preschool care with a teacher with a Bachelor's degree and an aide in each classroom at \$17,155 per child.

Norwalk Housing Authority: Actions Taken by Norwalk Early Childhood Council and Early Childhood Office

- Norwalk Early Childhood Office staff has been attending regularly scheduled manager's meetings.
- Early Childhood Office staff, Norwalk Early Childhood Council (NECC) Co-chairs, Cathy DeCesare and Bruce Morris and Joan Parris (NECC member and NCC Early Childhood Program Director) have met regularly with NHA childcare management team.

- School Readiness Coordinator, Jamie Bennetta, has been assisting with teaching staff interviews.
- School Readiness Coordinator and City of Norwalk Early Childhood Coordinator (Mary Oster) have been conducting regular monitoring visits at both locations.
- Site directors and education coordinators are part of a cohort that meets weekly for PD around early literacy.
- Three teachers at each site are receiving ongoing, onsite coaching around the PELI (Preschool Early Literacy Indicator) that all children in funded programs in Norwalk receive.
- Jamie Bennetta serves on the Parent Policy Council.
- Mary Oster sits on the Social Services Committee.
- Periodic meetings have taken place between the Mayor, NHA management, NECC and Norwalk Early Childhood and office staff.

Mrs. Oster stated that the Council had recently voted to allow 2% of the spots to be filled by children whose families don't necessarily live in Norwalk, but work there. Mr. Serasis clarified that these are slots that otherwise wouldn't be occupied, and Mrs. Oster answered in the affirmative. Mr. Serasis stated that a number of other early childhood sources have private funding and fees, as opposed to the services offered by Head Start.

Mrs. Oster stated that by 2017, half of their head teachers will have a bachelor's degree, and that there is a huge payment disparity between public school and preschool teachers, making retention difficult. She further stated that if they do hire someone with just a high school degree, they immediately get them on track towards earning an Associate's degree.

Mr. Bonenfant asked what the criteria is for the daycares to apply and receive funding. Mrs. Oster stated that the day care center must be licensed, then must apply with an RFP. She stated that they are inclined to renew their funding if they remain in good standing, and that the state is not inclined to finding new sites to fund.

Mr. Serasis asked if some of the sites cannot request funding services due to their inability to serve a certain percentage of underprivileged children. Mrs. Oster stated that for School Readiness, 40% of the children must fall below the median income. She stated that if they don't have enough of those children, they have to recruit to fill that spots, though they rarely have to do so, as not filling subsidized spots is nearly unheard of.

Mr. De Palma asked how they currently meet the demands of filling subsidized spots, and Mrs. Oster stated that they fill everything they get. She stated that they had a few empty spots, but that there are still children who don't attend preschool (25% in Norwalk), and if they managed to get

more, they could likely fill those spots. She stated that some of the families are harder to reach, and they would likely need to implement a door to door effort.

The Chair clarified Head Start's current situation to the committee as follows: Norwalk Housing Authority has taken control of Head Start since NEON went bankrupt about a year and a half ago. Young people need someplace to go, and they were able to set up the Housing Authority to get moving quickly. They took up a number of the NEON staff, but remain understaffed, and a number of the staff members are under-certified.

Candace Mayer, Deputy Director of the Authority, stated that they were notified they were awarded the grant, and originally planned to begin operations in April 2014. They were then asked to open on the 1st of February in mid-January. She stated that with that turnaround, it was incumbent that they brought the staff who were with CDI over. She stated that they did preliminary checks for security, got licensed and opened their doors February 2nd. She stated that by April 2015, it became evident that there were inherent challenges with the program, and that they asked the office of Head Start to use remaining funds to do an in-depth staff and operation review to address said issues. Mrs. Mayer stated that she still does not have a response to that request.

The Chair asked if she had put in a request to ATF. Mrs. Mayer stated that they had, and that they have put out an RFP. She stated that the City's Office of Early Childhood is working with them and has been very helpful.

Mrs. Mayer stated that she wished to highlight a current issue at hand, and gave the following account:

1. In November, there were a few incidents reported of there being unattended children over the summer. In addition, there was a lock on a bathroom door that was previously used and is now not up to code. They submitted a quality improvement program plan on November 2nd. On November 5th, the board was asked to go to the Head Start office in Boston. Staff members were not permitted to be a part of the first call. Director Winkler said they would be rejecting the Quality Improvement Plan, and would review another plan after it is reviewed by the Parent Council.
2. The Staff got right on creating another quality improvement plan, and had a technical consultant down on November 6th. On November 16th, they received an email from OHS dated November 10th and submitted November 2nd, re-stating the rejection of the plan but saying they were look forward to seeing the new plan.
3. They received an email request, and the board met with members of OHS, who stated they would be putting a summary suspension on the program as of November 25th. As a consequence, NHA terminated all the Head Start staff and informed all the parents.

4. On December 7th, CDI began operating Head Start on a 9 AM to 3 PM service, with no wraparound services. It is still unclear why OHS suspended the program when they received no suggestion of this, and were told they would be working together on a quality improvement plan.

Mrs. Mayer stated that the program constantly advertises for open positions, and that they go to local community colleges, job fairs, and local state colleges. She stated that there was one occasion where they had 16 interviews and only one person showed up. She stated that while their salaries are not atypical, they are inadequate, as indicated by the staff turnover rate. Mrs. Mayer stated that teaching requires continuity, and the high turnover rate also affects the gains the children could make.

Mr. Serasis asked about the base salary for teachers. Mrs. Mayer stated for those with a bachelor's degree, they could expect to make \$32,000. She stated that an Associate's would make \$27-28,000 and aids make around \$13,000. Mrs. Mayer stated that for private preschools, entry salaries are over \$40,000, which is a huge discrepancy in addition to having summers off. She stated that a number of preschool programs have a smaller, cozier feeling, while at present Head Start is more crowded, and it is a different type of program to manage.

Mr. Serasis asked if it would be credible for the city to make up the 26-27% pay difference, and if so where they would find the funding. Mrs. Mayer stated that it is difficult to ongoing funding, though she doesn't expect that any early childhood teacher gets into this profession for the monetary value of it.

Mr. Serasis asked how they can improve the pre-existing program in order to make the likelihood of funding better. Mrs. Mayer stated that they are working on the quality improvement plan for that reason.

Mr. De Palma asked if there is any cost of living adjustment for the Head Start program. Mrs. Mayer stated that it is a grant, and that it is very difficult to hire quality staff to do the program with such low wages. She stated that good staffing is key, and that they bring people in with a strong professional development plan. She stated that they have been very pleased in partnering with the Early Childhood Council. It was stated that as of September 1st, a search has been undertaken to find a Director for the Early Childhood Council. Mrs. Mayer stated that she would like to invite members of the committee to participate in the interview process.

Mr. Serasis asked who they report to, and what role the CDI plays. Mrs. Mayer stated that the CDI is hired to run the state and federal Head Start program.

Mrs. Oster stated that they are currently working on a 6 hour schedule, and hopefully beginning next week they will use the CDC wraparound money to create a 10 hour service for children.

Mr. Sacchinelli asked if a work study program would be feasible. Mrs. Mayer answered in the affirmative for the extended wrap hours, but stated that for core teachers, they need higher credentials.

Mr. Bonenfant asked if NEON were ever cited for coming up short on program goals, and Mrs. Mayer answered in the affirmative. Mr. Serasis stated, during their tenure, they were put under suspension at least 5 times.

Mr. Serasis stated that Norwalk Housing Authority was the most capable to step in in this situation, and that they were placed in a difficult situation.

Mrs. Mayer provided a copy of the letter they identified from OHS that detailed egregious findings at a program in New York, in which they did not receive a summary suspension.

The Chair asked how long the CDI can temporarily run the program, and Mrs. Mayer stated that they have to submit another improvement program to them by December 25th. She stated that they will be aided by the Office of Early Childhood.

The Chair stated that there is a great deal of expertise in Fairfield County to pull upon, and wants to ensure that we get a fair shake while making improvements.

OLD BUSINESS

No old business was discussed.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. SERASIS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Ramos
Telesco Secretarial Services

City of Norwalk
HWPS Committee
December 7, 2015
Regular Meeting

