

**CITY OF NORWALK
NORWALK EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
SEPTEMBER 9, 2009**

ATTENDANCE: Betsy Bain, Chair; Linda Wilock, Youth Service Director; Mary Budrawich, NPS Early Childhood Care Specialist; Lauriston Avery, Five Mile Nursery School Director; Evelyn Balamaci, Department of Social Services Manager; Hyla Crane, Stepping Stones Museum; Cathy DeCesare, United Way Coastal Fairfield County; Dona Ditrio, Community Representative; Adele Gordon, Norwalk Smiles Director; Dr. Sally Grose, Community Representative; George Hensinger, Community Representative; Shari Konn-Andrade, Childcare Liaison, 211; Curtis Law, Norwalk Housing Authority Director; Marie-Angie Nicolas, NCC Parent Representative; Mary Oster, Naramake Family Resources Ctr. Director; Joan Parris, NCC Early Childhood Program Director; Rovitta Paul, The Children's Playhouse Director; Lynn Sadlon Moritz, Fox Run Family Resource Center Director; Jeanne Taylor-Hard, Parent Representative; Paula Trujillo, Parent Representative; Victoria Schilling, Norwalk Health Department Coordinator; Marie Senteio, NEON Admin. & Support Services

STAFF: Barbara Smart, NECC; Rosalie Witt, NECC

OTHERS: Sonja Ahuja, Graustein Memorial Fund/Discovery; Marlene DeBellis, Side by Side Community School FRC; Stephanie Croswell, Growing Seeds; Joyce Abate, Carousel Preschool; Annette Yarber-Crooks, The Marvin Children's Center; Anthony Daddona, NPS Assistant Superintendent of Schools

MEETING CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Bain called the meeting to order at 9:34 p.m. Ms. Bain said that Mr. Daddona, the NPS Assistant Superintendent would be coming in later to speak to the group. She added that there were a number of changes in the Council membership.

INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Bain the requested that those present introduce themselves.

APPROVAL OF JUNE MINUTES

**** DR. GROSE MOVED THE MINUTES OF JUNE 10, 2009 MEETING.**

The following corrections were noted:

Page 1, under **GRAUSTEIN MEMORIAL FUND ASSESSMENT TOOL**, paragraph 1, line 5: please change “community making decision process” to “community decision making process”

Page 6, under **ANNOUNCEMENTS**, paragraph 6, line 5: please change “A Quality Committee” to “a local Quality Rating system”.

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JUNE 10, 2009 MEETING AS CORRECTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Ms. Bain said that the May minutes had been missing a page. She said that when the missing page was located, it would be brought to the Council in November.

GOOD NEWS

Ms. Bain said that there were two items to celebrate. One was the passage of the State Budget. The second item was that the fact that the Governor did not sign the budget, which did not allow her to line item veto items. This means that items that the Governor had intended to veto by using a line item were still in the budget.

Ms. Oster said that the Family Resource Centers were included as part of the budget and she wished to thank the Childhood Council for writing a letter to Hartford about this.

Mr. Hensinger said that at the Alliance meeting, since the Governor did not sign the budget, the entire issue of the rates during the summer and the first eight days of the budget year have to be determined. The OPM will be deciding what those rates will be. No decision has been reached at this time.

UPDATES – GRANTS

Quality Enhancement

Ms. Wilock said that she had received verbal confirmation that Quality Enhancement funds remained in the budget.

Because the budget took so long to finalize, there were discussion about the direction the Council will move in during the coming year. Ms. Budrawich said that the Program Committee would make recommendations to the Steering Committee before bringing it to the full Council for approval.

School Readiness

Ms. Paul asked if the providers would be receiving payment this month. Ms. Bain said that if the State decides not to make the payment retroactively, the School District would have to make a decision about providing full or partial payment because the District reimburses the programs. Ms. Sadlon asked for clarification on the payment situation, which Ms. Bain reviewed the cash flow issue with her. Discussion followed.

Ms. Wilock said that she would like to thank the school readiness providers for their patience during this time.

Monitoring Update – No new information

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Budrawich said that the Committee retreat was good and the Committee was trying to hone in on various goals. Last spring and fall, the Committee had workshops in partnership with NCC. It was decided not to have nighttime workshops because it put a strain on the providers who are taking classes, and also on the staff time.

This year there will be both a fall and spring conference. There will also be a new program for directors. The focus of the conferences will be “Intentional Teaching” along with attention to the local Quality Rating System. Ms. Budrawich said that the date was November 7th.

Ms. Bain said that the providers had been meeting over the summer. Ms. Paul said that the providers had given support to one another. She added that the Early Childhood staff had been wonderful and helpful in passing along information.

Ms. Budrawich said that there would be a Strategic planning session on October 14th.

Ms. Bain said that the Steering Committee met in early July and the concerns discussed were the leadership and planning for the future. Ms. Bain said that it was important to remember that everyone present was involved with early childhood issues. It will be a priority to focus on supporting everyone’s efforts in the future and make sure that everyone is involved in the action plans that are developed in the future. The plan is having the collaborative meetings on the alternate months when the Council is not meeting. Ms. Bain then handed out a flyer for the upcoming meeting.

Dr. Grose then reported about the work of the Parent Goals meeting. Dr. Grose said that it would be important to know what the finances are. Currently there are three workshops are planned. The first one will be October 8th, for the Parent Zone on Child’s Play from 6-8 p.m. at Stepping Stones along with a discussion on why children’s play is important.

On Feb. 27th, there will be a morning meeting on issues on Child Readiness and Literacy. A date was not announced for the third workshop.

Ms. Bain said that one of the goals was providing support, such as supporting the Family Resource Centers and these will continue to be supported with funds from the Graustein Memorial Fund; supporting the Parents' Circles, providing the Parent Zone, and finally providing messaging and marketing.

Ms. Schilling said that the Healthy Families Collaborative has been meeting over the summer. Children are screened during well child visits and the children that are identified as in need of services are referred to the Mid Fairfield County Child Guidance Center. There is discussion about expanding the program including home visits for children with severe issues. A local funding partner is needed to replicate the Child First program in Norwalk. The meeting with the Fairfield Community Foundation will be extremely important.

The Norwalk Community Center has hired a case manager to work with ob-gyn, and pediatrics patients. This will be a tremendous asset for the Center. The program is still the center focus, but the Center is looking for additional support.

Mr. Daddona joined the meeting at 10:12 a.m.

Ms. Gordon said that the only change in the dental care is that the program is proceeding to do restorative care at NEON and it is being hoped that this will be taken into the schools.

Ms. Schilling said that one of the goals was to have every child having their own primary care doctor. She said that there would be a case manager meeting on September 24th.

Ms. Bain said that as a result of staffing changes, Ms. Budrawich and Ms. Bain had conversations with Mr. Daddona about closer ties with the School District. Mr. Daddona said that he was happy to be here and that the NPS values the relationship with the Early Childhood Council.

Ms. Budrawich said that the Transition Committee met with Mr. Rowle about the articulation of Curriculum. There is a pre-school framework that links into the kindergarten curriculum. The focus has been primarily on the transition to kindergarten for the past twelve years. Now that this is firmly established, it is time to look at a broader scope. Discussion followed.

Ms. DeCesare asked about how the Brighter Futures program had gone. Ms. Budrawich said that the program was scaled back this year because the NCC facility was not available. That should have resulted in 96 slots, but the enrollment was up to 109. There

is a strong pattern of returning staff, which helps promote the program goals. Discussion followed about the program.

Ms. Ahuja said that she would like to comment about the fact that Greenwich was able to have 8-10 children who would not have pre-school experience helped this summer through enrollment in the program. Bridgeport just finished their second summer with the program and while they would have prefer expanding the program, they were not able to do this. Stratford just completed their first summer program.

Mr. Hensinger asked if the Brighter Futures students were identified in the kindergarten and also in the pre-screening. Ms. Budrawich said that this information is available. Dr. Grose pointed out that the program was now five years old and that the first group of students are now in third grade. Ms. Bain said that she would be like to be able to look at the information. Mr. Daddona then explained that there were federal regulations about providing information regarding students without a release. He suggested that the program consider getting a release from the parent when the child is enrolled in the Brighter Future's program to allow subsequent tracking in the school system.

Ms. Paul asked if the students from Brighter Futures are being taken out of pre-school. Ms. Budrawich said that the mix is always different. Ms. Budrawich said that the policy is not to take children from pre-school programs because they want the children who do not have pre-school experience. NEON also gives the program a list of recommended students that they are not able to provide services for. Some of the students are accepted into Brighter Futures, others are not.

Ms. Sadlon said that she liked the idea of having the parent sign the release early on. Ms. Sadlon then went on to suggest that at the last meeting for the program, whether the School Readiness providers could come to speak to the parents and make them aware of the various pre-school programs.

DISCUSSION – The Year Ahead: Opportunity and Challenges

Ms. Bain said that over the summer, the Graustein Memorial Fund released their vision for their 2010 grant opportunities over the summer. To start the process, they require a letter of interest by September 15th signed by the same five key signators that have requested before.

There are three options that can be applied for. The Partnership Option 1 would be the most likely avenue for the Early Childhood Council. Ms. Bain then read the criteria requirements for this particular option, which the Council meets. Ms. Bain then reviewed the sustainability table for the years 2010-2014.

Ms. Ahuja from the Graustein Memorial Fund said that the Council could apply for any project that it deemed worthy, but the Fund has a results based outcome. Ms. Bain read the policy statement and pointed out that Graustein was not interested in programs, but system changes. Ms. Budrawich said that the assumption appears to be that the Council already has an operating plan and that the system that would work within the plan. Dr. Grose commented that it might be good to look at what the barriers that children encounter for school readiness.

**** MR. LAW MOVED TO AUTHORIZE MS. BAIN TO SIGN THE LETTER OF INTENT TO THE GRAUSTEIN MEMORIAL FUND.**

**** MS. SADLON SECONDED**

Ms. Ahuja and Ms. Bain then reviewed the timeline for the application process.

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Ms. Bain said that Ms. Schilling had already mentioned the chance to pursue the Child First grant opportunity. Ms. Bain said that through the stimulus funds, there might be opportunity through the Housing Authority, but that she did not know the details of program at this time. There may be opportunities that blend well with the Council's goals.

Mr. Law said that the grant was about the reconfiguration of the public housing that are now considered obsolete. HUD is insisting that the Housing Authority ties in with the School system. He said that he would look into the details.

Ms. Paul commented that at the providers meeting, there were strong concerns expressed about the fact that the families know that the providers can not check the income of the families. The providers are struggling with the families who are not paying and there is no way to check on the family's income. Mr. Hensinger said that DSS has hired five investigators, but the investigations are triggered through the Care for Kids program. Ms. Bain asked if there was a statewide group or organization that would address this. Ms. Budrawich said that since Care for Kids is currently closed, the fraud has become rampant. The State is basically saying that neither the State nor DSS wish to be investigators. She said that policy changes would be the only way to address the issue.

Ms. Konn-Andrade said that in Bridgeport, some of the providers have been discussing asking for a W-2 form or another legal forms of income verification. Ms. Budrawich said that the system was designed that the provider would get 70% from the State and 30% would come from parent fees or Care for Kids. In these economic times, the gap between what Care for Kids and the parent's fees is becoming wider.

Ms. Hard left the meeting at 11:00 a.m.

Ms. Ditrio suggested that there should be strong advocacy to be directed to second funding streams. While Care for Kids is nice, some pressure needs to be put on DSS since some centers are closing because they were counting on the Care for Kids funding. The Care for Kids subsidy being used as a basis for the providers needs to be considered. Discussion then followed about revenue streams.

Ms. Schilling said that Janice Quindell had send out a request for assistance on gathering information from non-funding childcare providers.

Mr. Law reminded everyone that there had been losses in terms of NPS and City staff. Ms. Bain agreed and then reviewed the staff reductions. She said that the Council could not sustain this momentum indefinitely. This is an element of the October 14th meeting. Ms. Budrawich explained that the intent of that meeting was to talk about what is needed to be accomplished in the next three to five years. Another goal will be to see if there are new ideas on how to make these goals attainable. Ms. Paul said that she had some strong concerns about the fact that when the budget problem occurred, everyone was on vacation and this left almost an 4 million grant funding project in jeopardy. Ms. Budrawich said that the Council needs to approach the Superintendent of Schools and the Mayor with some type of proposal rather than asking them for direction. Ms. Bain said that she was working on getting a sense of what the various other communities are doing.

Mr. Law and two others left the meeting at 11:25 a.m.

The meeting on the 14th is an open meeting and Ms. Bain said that if there were people that should be at the meeting, their names should be forwarded to Ms. Budrawich. Ms. Ditrio asked whether the Council was looking at an ideal plan for Norwalk or a realistic plan. Ms. Budrawich explained that as the Council reviews the original plan, the items that are outside of the realm of reasonable implementation are noted. Then the plan is updated. By continually reviewing the plan, items that were not possible at an earlier time can be added in, or aspects that are not possible due to economics or staffing can be set aside for later consideration.

OTHER UPDATES

There were no additional updates to report at this time.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no additional announcements at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Bain adjourned the meeting at 11:33 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

