

New Haven Public Schools

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Teach Our Children
129 Church Street
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Dear Teach Our Children:

I write to reiterate my disappointment with the cessation of our dialogue, as evidenced at the Board of Education meeting on September 22. I also write to respond to the letters recently emailed to Mayor John DeStefano, Jr. and other members of the Board of Education, as well as the phone calls to Board members.

Please understand that I remain committed, not only to the children in the New Haven Public Schools, but to their parents, teachers, administrators and other staff working so hard on their behalf. I remain committed to working with Teach Our Children, as well as other organizations.

As you know, since the April meeting at the library, a group from TOC and I began meeting monthly, on May 28, July 8, and August 5, along with some of my staff and others. We had subcommittee meetings, where PPT information was reviewed and TOC members said they were pleased with the information. I found these meetings to be productive and positive. I anticipated another group meeting in early September to review progress. However, you wrote in August that you did not plan to meet. Instead, you decided to impose arbitrary timelines which had not been agreed to or discussed. Instead, you read your letter at the August 25 Board of Education meeting, thanked me for my attention to these issues and for my commitment to children, and reiterated your refusal to meet.

I have listened to your concerns and continue to take the issues you have raised very seriously. I have shared those concerns with my staff, have invited you to take part in the process and have worked to implement a number of solutions to issues you raised. We have made significant progress on many of your requests discussed during the spring and summer – some of which have been implemented and others of which are near ready for implementation, as I noted at the September 22 Board meeting.

At my meeting with principals on August 26, Marilyn Chalmers reviewed the PPT process, the new bullying law, special education policy and procedures, and expulsions. I reviewed the proposals for the Code of Conduct, homework for suspended students, and other items. Ms. Chalmers and her staff continue to meet with PPT chairs the third Monday of every month.



Until you wrote in August about your refusal to continue to meet with my staff and me at the August 25 Board meeting, I was optimistic about the cooperative relationship we had been developing. I was looking forward to discussing progress in September (had we done so, you would have disseminated more accurate information to your group and others) and to moving to other items on our agenda, together. Instead, your agenda is advancing by ambush and demands; TOC is an important group, but so are other parents, parent groups and other constituencies whose concerns must be taken into account for the school district.

I have been honest and open with you about the District's hurdles in implementing the suggestions you have: funding from the state, parental involvement and participation, adequate staffing and facilities for recess, and the potential unforeseen effects of implementing sweeping policy changes without first going through a thoughtful process with principals and others. In fact, I noted my concerns on a blanket homework policy and said I wanted to work them out further before implementing it.

I have reached out for your support to help us overcome these hurdles.

- I offered to have our lobbyist and the mayor's legislative liaison sit down with you to talk about how we can work together at the State Legislature to bring home funding for in-school suspension services, restoration of funding for our early reading success programs, general education funding and other necessary programs. You declined. I renew that offer as now, more than ever, we need to work together on behalf of funding for programs and services for our children.
- I asked you to participate in the Board's Wellness Committee – the entity which is the forum for the issue of recess. You have not attended a meeting since that request, despite your prior commitment to do so.
- We both agreed that many of the issues you raise stem from lack of parental involvement and knowledge of the District's existing policies and procedures. I asked for your help in bringing more parents to orientation sessions and parent-teacher conferences, for ideas on how to reach and involve more parents in their children's schools and for assistance in educating parents about District policy. You declined.
- I asked for your patience while my staff drafts new policy, being sure to consider the needs of all students, parents and teachers in the District. I understand the need to act, as do you, but I also believe that the changes sought need input from many, and time for that input. Your demands do not take that into account.

I am disappointed. I am disappointed that your actions have constituted demands and arbitrary timelines rather than cooperative efforts on the issues we have discussed.

In your recent letter you outline concerns about specific issues. I will address each in turn:

Homework for Suspended Students

Ms. Leida Pacini has continued to meet with the working group of principals. She has met with teachers on the proposal. It will be reviewed again with the entire principals group at the administrators' meeting next week, based upon comments we have received. I expect to have a

procedure in place for K-8 schools by November 15. It will be a pilot in the K-8 schools for several months to work out any kinks. We expect to follow a similar path in developing a homework procedure for suspended high school students by January 1, which again will be a pilot for several months. State law requires an opportunity to make up the work, but I wanted to develop a procedure that goes above and beyond the state law. We are doing so at our own initiative, gathering input from many interested parties, once again going beyond our legal responsibilities.

Code of Conduct

My staff is meeting again with Dr. Graniero later this month, to review input and recommendations from many interested parties, including TOC and the Juvenile Review Board. I expect to have a revised draft in December. I do not expect that each and every recommendation from each and every interested party will be incorporated but I do expect a reasonable and consistent Code of Conduct that will serve students, their families and staff well.

Bullying and Provisions of Public Act 08-160

The district is in compliance with the bullying provisions of Public Act 08-160. Ms. Chalmers and Ms. Dee Speese-Linehan reviewed the new law when it was passed and found that our existing policy (updated in 2004) is already fully compliant with the new requirements. The new law also requires districts to provide a copy of the policy to the State Department of Education by February 1, 2009 and to include the policy in our rules, procedures and standards of conduct for schools and all student handbooks by July 1, 2009. We will satisfy all requirements prior to the state mandated deadlines. We continue to regard bullying as a serious issue; we have a committee reviewing all policies for consistency, which is a part of the process contemplated in the law, and we continue to include bullying as part of our ongoing professional development curriculum.

Behavioral and Academic Assessments

Specifically as to behavioral and academic assessments, in point 4 of your letter dated October 1:

- In (1) you ask for the procedures to inform parents of what behavioral assessments and plans are available. You appear to have blurred the distinctions between regular education discipline and special education procedures.
 - Regular Education Discipline: When behavioral issues arise in the classroom, teachers meet with parents to discuss strategies for resolution. When, and if, those issues become excessive, it becomes a special education matter.
 - Special Education Procedures: If a student's behavioral problems are so extreme to merit professional intervention, it becomes a special education issue and a PPT takes place. Ms. Chalmers and her staff have met with TOC representatives several times and provided written information on the function of PPTs (Planning Placement Teams) and procedures for parental notification of the availability of behavioral assessment and plans. It was acknowledged by the TOC representatives who attended the subcommittee meetings that the district has a consistent policy which works effectively. These representatives acknowledged that the complaints raised by TOC stemmed from a lack of knowledge of how and when the PPT process is invoked. TOC representatives left those meetings with

their issues addressed and our staff considered this issue resolved. The same issues are now being brought up as if the review of procedures with the subcommittee had not taken place. My staff and I have been meeting with you in good faith; we expect the same from you.

- As reviewed previously with your representatives, IDEA 2004 (federal special education regulations) states that both the school district and parent(s) should decide who is a relevant member of the “team” to determine a “manifestation of behaviors.” These meetings/notifications are done pursuant to statutory and regulatory requirements, through PPTs. As Ms. Chalmers has discussed with you in the past, our district makes a “prompt referral” to a PPT of all children who have been suspended repeatedly or whose behaviors, attendance or progress in school is considered unsatisfactory, or at a marginal level of acceptance. This is when FBAs and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) can be done. This was all reviewed, in detail, with the special education subcommittee members comprised of TOC representatives, Ms. Chalmers and her staff. She gave your members the Special Education Policies and Procedures Manual for New Haven Public Schools, dated 2007. This manual includes the actual FBA and BIP documents used for New Haven staff, parents and students. I encourage your members to read this Manual along with all other materials, including the Parents Rights to Due Process, provided to your members by Ms. Chalmers.
- In (2) you ask how this procedure differs from previous years. It has been the same procedure since it was implemented through legislation in 2004.
- In (3) you ask for the procedure for notifying parents of students who are in danger of failing any subject and putting a plan in place for teachers to address academic issues. I recall that we spent a significant amount of time on this question and on retention notification for K-8 students at our summer meetings. For students in danger of failing, parents are notified in writing mid-term. Parents meet with the teacher, and review the teacher’s plan or course of action for the student. The plan is provided to the principal, who sends it to the principal’s director of instruction. After the plan is implemented, if the student is danger of retention, the parents are again notified in writing. You have also requested that the teacher’s plan be mailed to the parents along with the notification. We do not find this to be sound policy. Parental involvement and responsibility is key here. It is imperative that parents meet with teachers so they can walk through the plan together, outlining ways to help the student both at school and at home. The plan put together by the teacher is tailored to each student and best understood in consultation with a parent, so that the recommendations and acronyms may be discussed together, so that the parent understands and agrees with the plan. This is why we have asked you to assist in parental outreach to improve parental involvement. We want our students to do well, at school and at home, and to keep them focused in class and out.

Translation Services

You have now raised a new issue. In recent publicized meetings you demanded increased translation services (without the courtesy of first meeting with me or my staff on this topic). Of course it is important for parents to be able to communicate with the school system. The district understands this and has translators available for many situations. However, we have students

and parents from dozens of countries here in New Haven, with many languages spoken and great cultural diversity. We work with the students to help them learn English, and others work with their families. We translate many materials into other languages (for example all PPTs in the New Haven Public Schools are translated into the parent's native language upon request). We do have full time translation services at some schools. We do not have the resources to translate numerous languages at every meeting and gathering; we do not have the resources to translate every document that goes home. If this is an issue that you are interested in exploring further, we suggest that you take it up with the state legislature and request fully funded translation services in the public schools. We would be more than happy to support such an endeavor.

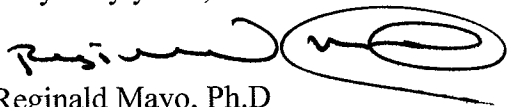
Future Relationship between TOC and New Haven Public Schools

As the Superintendent of the New Haven Public Schools, I am responsible for the education and well being of all 20,000 of my students. When I make a policy change which will impact these 20,000 students, their parents, their teachers, and their principals, it needs to be the right policy. It needs to be a policy that will work and will weigh the needs of all students. I will not be pressured into adopting sweeping changes to meet an arbitrary deadline randomly selected by a special interest group.

We welcome input from parents and community allies, and would also welcome more support services from community allies, as we see funds being reduced for the very interventions designed to help our students. I believe our meetings were productive and can be again. I have been and continue to be completely open with TOC in our meetings. I request that TOC join me in this openness and transparency by fully disclosing all of its Board members, funding sources and staff.

You have brought issues to me and I have brought issues to you. It is unfortunate that, at present, you appear to be unwilling to work together on all these issues. I will continue to work on them with my staff, and I hope you join us, as I believe cooperative efforts result in changes that will benefit all students of the New Haven Public Schools.

Very truly yours,



Reginald Mayo, Ph.D
Superintendent of Schools

cc: Board of Education Members
Frances Padilla