

**Human Rights Commission**  
**Esther Howland Chamber, Worcester City Hall**  
**Meeting Summary – August 2, 2010**

Present: Cheryl Pope, Chair; Eduardo Rivera, Vice-Chair; Maria Flores, Kathy Gervais, Mable Millner, Edward G. Robinson

Unable to Attend: Edward Kwiyup, Trinh Huynh

Members of the Public: Herbert S. Cremer (member, Commission on Disabilities), Ted Kostas and Thomas Gorham

1. Meeting called to order at 6:02 by Cheryl Pope, Chair  
Cheryl Pope, Chair, welcomed all and facilitated introductions.
  
2. Guest: Dr. Melinda Boone, Superintendent of Worcester Public Schools
  - Dr. Boone shared her background: speech and language audiologist by training, Director of Special Education and other administrative positions. She served on the Commonwealth of Virginia's Community Service Boards for mental health, substance abuse, early intervention and prevention. She was appointed Superintendent of Worcester Public Schools (WPS) in 2009.
  - She stated that she was pleased to attend the Human Rights Commission meeting and expressed her committed to access and opportunity as well as her familiarity with the difficulties and challenges in doing so.
  - In describing her primary goal, she stated: "To ensure WPS becomes the preferred educational opportunity for all in the community."
    - By 2012, 80% of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders will perform at grade levels.
    - By 2013, 100% of high school graduates will have access to rigorous educational curriculum.
  - In September 2009, Worcester developed an improvement strategy. This incorporates 4 pillars of work which address educational disparities, which she prefers to address as achievement or opportunity gaps (those gaps are ones that WPS controls and will improve):
    - Continue to increase literacy performance on MCAS
    - Improve achievement of students with disabilities
    - Improve achievement of students who are English Language Learners
    - Ensure career preparation or educational achievement.
  - When she first joined the district last year, her priorities were:
    - accountability – formed a Task Force to address accountability throughout the system (2 year plan)
    - student achievement
    - safe, secure and disciplined environment in all schools
    - parental engagement in community

These priorities are incorporated into professional development. WPS no longer waits for the end of the school year to make improvements/changes. For example, when focusing on data we do not blame. WPS can celebrate achievements and bring the

community into the improvement processes, such as the two level 4 schools -Chandler Magnet and Union Hill Schools - are doing.

- Dr. Boone views data gathering and accountability (state level, federal requirements and review of federal entitlements) as positive.
- In January 2009, the U.S. Dept. of Justice mandated a consent decree with WPS regarding English Language Learners and their families. Dr. Boone stated that simply complying with the decree is not sufficient (“Compliance is what we do when no one is looking and doesn’t mean we are doing good enough.”)
- Regarding conflict resolution and bullying, Dr. Boone stated that WPS is seeing positive results with the PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention System). She is committed to developing a culture within schools that focuses on mutual respect for all in the building. She would like to have more training. WPS has had strong language in the student handbook for years. Dr. Boone further stated that WPS responds to parents concerns. She cautioned that: “We can’t always put band aids on situations; we have to find the root causes.” Dr. Boone has a Superintendent Advisory Council which meets monthly and is comprised of 35 student representatives from the high schools. Bullying has been on the agenda. Discussion includes exploring questions, such as, Where are the tension points? Who are the greatest offenders?
- Dr. Boone is collaborating with other superintendents in Central Massachusetts regarding implementation of the new anti-bullying legislation.
- Family engagement is a priority. CPAC (Citywide Parent Advisory Council) and SPEDPAC (Special Education Parent Advisory Council) meet regularly. The key questions, according to Dr. Boone, are “How to get people engaged? and How to make it meaningful?”
- Customer service is critical. Dr. Boone eliminated the security officer at the Central Administration Building which was off-putting to parents. A bilingual (English/Spanish) clerical person now greets individuals. She is working toward developing the Parent Information Center into one-stop shopping. She shared with Commissioners her experiences visiting school buildings last year without identifying herself. One challenge is she addressing now is that report cards are sent home in English only and learned about this from a parent.
- In response to the Commission’s question: What can the HRC do? Dr. Boone responded:
  - Encourage people to be advocates for their children and participate in CPAC and SPEDPAC meetings.
  - WPS is more than willing to receive information.
  - Support improved accessibility of schools.
  - Support the goal: Achievement for everyone to be productive members of the community is possible.
- Questions and Answers with Commissioners:
  - Commissioner Eduardo Rivera: Could you please comment on acts of discrimination within WPS? Superintendent Boone: “The majority of acts of discrimination are errors of omission and not intentional. In our society, everyone has biases. At WPS we make sure policies do not perpetuate discrimination.” Furthermore, Dr. Boone stated: “We ask the following questions: What would

every parent want for their children in school? What do schools have to offer? What is the gap?" We have to set expectations first, and then address beliefs and values. We build upon what we want people to do and how we expect them to behave; in that way, success will breed success.

- Also from Commissioner Rivera: Please tell us about peer mediation programs in the middle and high schools. Dr. Boone stated that a grant funded a peer mediation program in the past but it was not sustainable. She agrees with the concept, but will not be a stand alone program.
- Commissioner Cheryl Pope inquired about math requirements. Dr. Boone stated that students currently need 3 or 4 years of math above algebra to graduate. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has left specific graduation requirements to local school districts. Dr. Boone also reported that students are asking for other options to get physical education requirements. Dr. Boone's administration is looking at making relevant adjustments in the following areas: math, science, foreign language, and social studies. Students should not be hindered or limited because they have not had access to enough of core classes. We need to learn from the success of Worcester Technical High School with blends skills-based career aspirations with rigorous academics. They are expanding AP classes.
- Where in the educational process does civics fit in? Dr. Boone commented that civility, citizenship and neighborliness are all being looked at within WPS and the required learning frameworks. Some students learn about civics through community service or service learning. The HOAP Coalition has a priority on civics education with high school students working on public policy and legislation. One question we might address together is how to bring civics to adults/parents? All high schools have some component that incorporates civics.
- Key Personnel at WPS: Dolores Gribouski and Mary Meade Montague are the Quadrant Managers. Marco Rodriguez is new Director of Special Education and is bilingual/bicultural. Dr. Sergio Paez is Director of English Language Learner's program.
- Herbert S. Cremer, member of the City of Worcester's Commission on Disabilities, asked about implementing the new anti-bullying legislation. Dr. Boone stated that all student complaints must be investigated. It is not yet clear what the final policy and procedure will be and she is working with other Central Mass. superintendents. Mr. Cremer invited Dr. Boone to attend a meeting of the Commission on Disabilities and Dr. Boone agreed; a future date and time will be set.
- Fran Manocchio described some of the collaborative efforts with WPS – City Manager's Community Coalition on Bias and Hate, the RESPECT: It's the Way to Play initiative and success in working with Quadrant Managers regarding parent's complaints.
- On behalf of the Commission, Cheryl Pope thanked Dr. Boone for her time, passion and commitment.

### 3. July meeting summary approved as submitted.

4. Status of Move to City Hall: Officially moved in July 2<sup>nd</sup>. All phones and fax were not operational for nearly 3 weeks.
5. Old Business:
  - a. Know Your Rights: On July 15, 2010, Eduardo Rivera, Himal, and Fran Manocchio met with Capt. Jerry O'Rourke and Lt. Fran Assad from Worcester Police Dept. Bureau of Professional Standards. We are making progress on the final steps of this project. Fran is coordinating translation into Arabic and Chinese.
  - b. Update on Liveries: Eduardo Rivera provided an update on the liveries. Five year of work may result in a compromise. Commissioners expressed their appreciation to Eduardo for his persistence.
  - c. Update on Social Justice Roundtable: Kathy Gervais and Cheryl Pope reported that the next meeting will be held on September 16, 2010 at the YWCA. Recent meeting held resulted in the formation of a new work group focusing on the arts. Members also continue to work on a mission statement.
  - d. Eleanor Hawley Award Work Plan: Commissioners approved material and Fran will send out electronically and hard copy.
  - e. December 10<sup>th</sup> U.N. Declaration of Human Rights Day Public Education Forum: Brainstorm topics: Bias and hate, immigration, bullying/conflict resolution, human rights of special populations, neighborhood conflicts. Fran stated that employment discrimination cases continue to be the majority. Discussion held regarding public education on employment rights. Commissioners requested that Fran invite Malcolm Medley, Chair of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, as the keynote speaker. Approved unanimously.
6. Other Business: Fran reported that the Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts is holding a community event on October 17, 2010 at the Hanover Theatre featuring Kareem Abdul-Jabbar who will speak on "How Cultural Diversity Inspires Personal and Communal Growth". The Jewish Federation has asked that the HRC sign as a sponsor (no financial requirements). Commissioner Mable Millner offered a motion to have the HRC join as a sponsor; Commissioners approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:10 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Fran Manocchio  
August 27, 2010