



SMITH HILL REPORT

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Central Falls Teachers' Union and RIFTHP Visit Congressional Leaders in D.C.

Union leaders, including Central Falls Teachers Union President **Jane Sessums**, met Wednesday, March 3 with Rhode Island congressional leaders in Washington, D.C., to brief them on what is happening at Central Falls High School. The leaders met with Sen. Jack Reed, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse and Rep. James Langevin, and with staff of Rep. Patrick Kennedy.

Jane Sessums stated: "We met yesterday with Central Falls teachers, and we went to Washington to tell their stories directly to our representatives about the teachers' commitment to their students and community, and the progress they have made over the years in spite of the constant turnover of school leaders and reform ideas." She said they made it clear to the congressional leaders that the union has always been open to the majority of changes proposed by the district, but that the conversation was cut off by the Superintendent before they could ever discuss specific reform proposals. She also reiterated the need for both sides to return to the table and work collaboratively to reach a comprehensive solution.

"We want to thank our leaders in Washington for meeting with us. We had productive conversations where we laid out the facts and agreed to keep our national leaders up to date as we work toward a solution," stated Marcia Reback, President of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals.

On Tuesday, March 2, the CFTU proposed a reform plan for Central Falls High School that includes specific programs proven to raise student achievement levels. The proposal has the full support of the Central Falls High School faculty.

The union's reform approach recommends:

- Implementing research-based high school reform programs like America's Choice and Diploma Plus;
- Increasing instructional time for students;
- Enhancing the support system for students;
- Increasing teaching quality by rigorously evaluating teachers and providing all teachers with opportunities for targeted teacher training; and
- Creating a collaborative and data-informed teaching and learning environment.

Teacher Termination Notification Date – May 15

On Tuesday, March 2, the RIFTHP testified *against* S2165 (DiPalma) before the Senate Labor Committee. This bill would amend the notification requirements regarding the dismissal, suspension or lay-off of teachers in the event of a fiscal emergency or program reorganization. The RIFTHP stated that it **cannot** support S2165 as it is written because it would permit firing teachers (as opposed to laying teachers off) for fiscal or program reorganization. The RIFTHP has been working with the bill's main sponsor, Senator Louis DiPalma, and the NEARI to craft language that would be agreeable to all the parties. The bill was held for further study.

Commissioner Gist Testifies before Senate Education Committee

On Wednesday, February 24, the RIFTHP attended a hearing of the Senate Education Committee where Commissioner Deborah Gist testified concerning the RI Department of Education's plans. No public testimony was taken.

Among other issues, the firing of every teacher and most other educational personnel at the Central Falls High School, caused by the adoption of the "Turnaround" reform model, was brought up. Central Falls Senator Elizabeth Crowley joined committee members, Senator Hanna Gallo, Chair, Senators James Sheehan, Frank DeVall, Louis DiPalma, Bea Lanzi and Christopher Maselli in questioning her involvement in and sanctioning of the decision of Central Falls Superintendent Frances Gallo to fire all the school teachers. Commissioner Gist claimed to have had little or no input, other than "technical assistance" in the activities leading up to the selection of the "Turnaround" model and the subsequent termination of the Central Falls teachers. She stated that she would not describe the talks held between the union and the administration, before the selection of the chosen model, as "negotiations". She also stated that she believed that it was too late to go back to the "Transformation" model, but that if approached by Superintendent Gallo about changing the chosen model to allow for the continued employment of the teaching faculty, she would consider it and take it under advisement.

When asked about the likely future of the Race to the Top federal grant application, Commissioner Gist stated that she spoke with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan over the weekend and was told she would know soon if we were on track for approval. Commissioner Gist offered that RI's chances to move to the next step of the grant process depended a lot on how much help she got from the legislature in removing the cap on charter schools and showing some movement on the issue of a statewide education funding formula. Additionally, she stated, it would be helpful if more teachers' unions were to sign-on to the grant, which she thought would happen once the unions understood it better.

RIFTHP Testifies before House Labor Committee

On Tuesday, March 2, the RIFTHP testified **against** H7394 (Trillo) before the House Labor Committee. This bill would require that if a city or town charter or ordinance empowers a city or town council to ratify the collective bargaining agreements of its school committees, then no collective bargaining agreement is effective unless ratified by the city or town council. As we have done each year this bill is introduced, the RIFTHP testified that this process would prolong labor negotiations by creating another whole layer of negotiations while giving the municipality another bite of the apple. The bill was held for further study.

The RIFTHP also testified **against** H7428 (Gablinske). This bill would prohibit the payment for unused or accumulated sick time for State and municipal employees at the end of their

employment. The RIFTHP, along with several other public employee unions, testified that this benefit is a negotiated item and should be left in the collective bargaining arena. Additionally, the RIFTHP testified that this benefit was originally negotiated at the request of the State as a cost-saving measure, giving employees an incentive to accrue their earned sick leave. Representative Lisa Baldelli-Hunt, an original co-sponsor of the bill, spoke against the bill likening it to "changing the rules at the end of the game." She indicated that in her town of Woonsocket, two administrators recently retired based on their anticipation of this bill being passed, getting huge lump sum payments, something the town cannot afford. The bill was held for further study.