

EDUCATION & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
MINUTES

A meeting of the Education & Technology Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on January 31, 2012.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Sarah S. Anker, Chairwoman
Leg. Wayne R. Horsley, Vice Chair
Leg. Thomas Cilmi
Leg. Jay H. Schneiderman
Leg. Thomas Muratore

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk
Kevin Peterman, Suffolk Community College
Dan Linker, Suffolk Community College
Cynthia Eaton, Suffolk Community College
Marie Hanna, Suffolk Community College
Chris DeLuca, Aide to Leg. Cilmi
Benny Pernice, Budget Review Office
Jill Moss, Budget Review Office
Rick Brand, Newsday
Richard Meyer, AME

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 1:00 PM

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Welcome to my first committee meeting as the Chair of the Education and Information Technology. We have a very short agenda today. And I'd like to start off by standing and doing the Pledge of Allegiance.

SALUTATION

Would you please remain standing for a moment of silent meditation in honor of the many people in our country that need prayers? Thank you.

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

LEG. CILMI:

That would be us.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Notice I left it wide open. *Everybody*. Thank you. You can be seated.

Okay, so, we have no cards today so, again, would anybody like to speak regarding any issues that are not involved in the presentation being given today? Okay. I don't see any additional speakers.

PRESENTATION

I'd like to bring up -- let's see, what do we have on our agenda here? Suffolk Community College has presenters today. Would you please come up? You can make yourself comfortable at the table. There's a couple of microphones.

So today we have the Faculty Association of Suffolk Community College Professors on Wheels presentation. And I see Kevin Peterman is here today and also --

MR. PETERMAN:

Dan Linker.

MR. LINKER:

My name is Dan Linker. I'm a faculty member at Suffolk County Community College. It's odd for me to be talking from a seated position. It's something new so I apologize for that.

First, I'd like to thank you very much for giving us the time to talk today, including us on your agenda. I really do appreciate that. I'm not going to take up much of your time, but I do want to tell you a little bit about our program called Professors on Wheels. We've been running it for about two years. It is an initiative completely done by the union, by the faculty association. And so far we've met with terrific success and we're looking for even more. So, I think the possibilities of this program are endless.

Briefly, I'm just going to tell you a little bit about where it came from and what we do. While the union has always been obviously involved in community outreach doing wonderful things with the community, and the College itself in some ways is completely dedicated to community, even right now we have somewhat in the neighborhood of 25, 26,000 students, we realized a couple of years ago that we can do more. You asked a few moments ago for us to remain silent for all the people who need our prayers. And that's good. But some of you have to also be noisy for those people who need our help and need our prayers. And we realized that there is a huge population on Long Island, especially in Suffolk County, but Nassau as well, but we're Suffolk County, that we couldn't

bring into the College; it wasn't easy to do. A very needy population, one that does need our prayer, does need our hope. And that was the seniors.

We have a tremendous number of seniors on Long Island, many of whom cannot come to the College, many of whom who have never had the opportunity even to get a college education, but they desperately want it. And so for a lot of our community outreach events, we'll be raising money, we'd be supporting other -- any kind of noble charitable cause, but we realized that we have something we could offer for free and that they need. We have our expertise. We have our passion. We have our interests.

So we started a pilot program at a place called Island Nursing and Rehabilitation Center two years ago. And we had about five or six faculty members, and also union members, to go and present on any topic that they're interested in, but probably on their focus or -- academic focus. And we didn't know how it would go. And it went really, really, really well. The residents loved it.

The very first presentation was by one of our English faculty who was talking about playwriting. And he got some of these people who are in their '70's, '80's, some older than that, to gather in groups and even make little short skits and write plays. They were enthusiastic. They did not want him to leave and they asked for him to come back as soon as possible. And we sent several other people over the course of the semester. All met with similar success.

At the end of that year, the Director there named Lori Prescott, held kind of a graduation ceremony for her residents. She brought caps and gowns and mortar boards, they played Pomp and Circumstance. They were marched in or wheeled in in their wheelchairs. Their families were there, their children, their grandchildren. There were speeches. There were presentations. Newsday did a wonderful write up on it.

MR. PETERMAN:

These are actually some photos of that event. (Indicating) It was very -- it was very moving to see these individuals, you know, having been wheeled in and getting a certificate for attending, you know, eight or ten lectures. It was a very moving experience. And they did this the last two Junes. I'm sure they'll do it again this June. But you can see that the people were just so thrilled to be part of that process and we wanted to share that with you.

MR. LINKER:

So the following year we ran it again through Island Nursing. We added about four or five other facilities to our list. And really the sky's the limit. We've got about 2000 union members who are professors, adjunct and full-time at the College. That's 2000 people who are qualified to go out and talk to this tremendous population. We held a small kind of press event last -- two Fridays ago, which was very well received. We've got as many facilities as there are on Long Island -- are all potential places. It doesn't have to be just the ones we've worked with. Anybody can do it. And so what we're hoping to do is to make this even bigger than it is now and more successful. We've had two wonderful Newsday write-ups, two graduation ceremonies, as Kevin was just saying. We want to have 50.

So I'm just glad to kind of explain a little bit of what this is, where it came from, what we can do. They can range from something that's more active to, you know, like physical activity to -- not all of these nursing homes or assisted living facilities, not all of them are permanent. In other words, not all the -- not all the residents stay there overnight. So we can talk about home modifications for people who are in wheelchairs. We can talk about science. We can talk about math. Even some of our passions. One presenter talks about the history of sailboat racing on the Great South Bay. It was very well received. So the more support we have for this, the more support that Suffolk County Community College has, the greater we can make this program. And I think we can really touch a substantial number of people in the County.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

I just wanted to, again, comment that we have a wealth of wisdom in our senior population. My district has, I think, one of the larger senior district populations. And I commend you on what you're doing and finding resources which basically are volunteers. These are volunteers; is that correct?

MR. LINKER:

Absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

So, I commend you on what you're doing.

MR. LINKER:

Well, thank you very much. And the wealth that you're talking about, yeah, they do. When we present, I think all of us always learn from them. The one time -- I was presenting once on the history of the English language, and I played a tape of somebody reading an Old English poem, and one of the residents of the facility stood up and said that the man reading that was from Wales. He had a Welsh accent. And it turned out that that gentleman was from Wales. And we got into about a five minute conversation talking about where Wales came from, where the Welsh language came from, how it has evolved, what's happening to it. The rest of the residents loved it. The gentleman who was talking was in his glory. He had an audience. And I learned from him. And so that was really fantastic, but thank you.

MR. PETERMAN:

Just, we also are thinking of trying to branch out a little if we can get enough volunteers --

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

You have to push the button.

MR. PETERMAN:

I'm sorry. If we get enough volunteers, we're hoping that maybe we can go to adult communities and do those kinds of presentations, not just health-related facilities or nursing homes or things like that.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Oh, that would be wonderful.

MR. PETERMAN:

That's our goal.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Legislator Cilmi has a question for you.

LEG. CILMI:

Yes, thanks Madam Chair. So we're using this -- these volunteers for an excellent program. Is there a way that we can sort of take this foundation and use the volunteers not only to educate the homebound seniors, etcetera, but that we can also help to educate those who may not be able to afford a college education? Some of -- some of our younger folks that are in economically depressed communities that may not have hope even for a community college education, is there some way we can expand it, and in so doing actually generate some economic development out of the program as well?

MR. PETERMAN:

I don't want -- I don't want to speak for the College, because this is a union project, but I do think

that the College does have programs that do try and reach out to students that are at risk, if you will. I know that the College has several programs they're developing even now to try and do even more. But as far as -- you know, our faculty is always willing to work with the administration to do whatever we can creatively to do -- to spread the word, if you will. I don't think that's off the table, but I think right now we're focused on the seniors. But I do know the College has some -- several initiatives to try and reach that population as well.

LEG. CILMI:

What have you found to be some of the most popular topics or are there certain professors who seem to be in greatest demand with this program?

MR. LINKER:

Well, the first Professor who spoke about playwriting happened to be a very good looking guy {Easton Hiderman}. But another one which has strangely, I never thought that this would elicit the response it did, but there's -- one of our presenters talks on stem cell research. And most of the residents are beyond -- most of the people who are in this lecture are not going to benefit from stem cell research. They're not -- that's not what's happening, but they're so fascinated in science that it -- while I didn't think it was an inappropriate topic, when he first presented, some of us were *give it a shot*, and they loved it. Because they don't get a lot of math and science and they haven't had a lot of math and science. And many of them don't even have a high school diploma. So while you can read poetry, you can hear -- you can learn about history, you can look at maps. To have a real scientist come in and talk about matters that are a little beyond what you've ever thought about absolutely fascinated them. So the math and science topics have really taken off.

LEG. CILMI:

So we're always looking for ways to get more of Suffolk students to stay home and come to Suffolk instead of going to Nassau Community College, etcetera. So maybe we should -- we should adopt a motto *come to Suffolk because we have the better looking professors*.

MR. PETERMAN:

Oh, we probably do.

LEG. CILMI:

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

MR. PETERMAN:

Just so you know, in the packet, I did give you --

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Push the button.

MR. PETERMAN:

-- brochures of some of the programs that were -- that we did offer.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Now, do you go yourself to -- so you've been to the nursing facilities?

MR. LINKER:

Yes. Generally I don't schedule myself in. I just kind of -- I'm like a floater so if somebody cancels or gets sick at the last minute, I can shoot over there and do it. And it's not easy. I will say that. When you generally go in -- actually every time I've gone, I've gone about six times, they're there all ready. They're lined up either sitting at tables or in wheelchairs and they're ready for you. And, you know, as a professor, I'm used to walking in, or having my office -- being able to settle down and think about it. But they just throw you right in. And their response is absolutely outstanding.

Some of them, they're quasi-lucid but many of them are rapt.

And, yeah, as I said, I present also on the history of the English language and a little bit on some linguistics. And I asked some questions I never really thought about, you know, involved in the history, you know, how -- where English came from, what certain words mean. I will play -- I saw on a table somebody reading Captain's Hand or some old Beowulf in Old English, then some of the Canterbury Tales, then I will read some of the Lord's Prayer together in Old English and Middle English and Modern English. And watching this kind of click as they recognize words in Old English that they're still using in Modern English is great. But it's certainly not easy. It's a different type of teaching.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Do you bring in computers? Are you able to present newer technology to the senior community?

MR. LINKER:

Absolutely. Most of our presenters have something on a PowerPoint presentation. It's the best way to present. You don't have handouts that they're flipping through or they're losing track of it. It's a big screen. Unfortunately, many of the facilities do not have that; do not have that technology. So what we do is we rent them. We borrow them from the College. And -- but they're also fascinated -- one of the presentations was on architecture. And the union member was an architect and she talked about Frank Lloyd Wright and two other architects whose names escape me at the moment. And she had pictures of the buildings they designed, the churches. And what was great, some of the residents had been there. One -- several were in Paris and a few other throughout Europe. This year they did the Guggenheim, too, in New York and some had been there. And then one facility, one's been to a field trip to the Guggenheim afterwards so they could savor it. So, yeah, we definitely use technology because it just -- it makes it so much more robust when you can see the pictures of what you're talking about.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

I remember when I was in high school, I had a teacher who required us to interview a senior person. And it was called Fireside Chat. It was books that were published and it was introduced by the high school students. And maybe that's something else you can look into. I bet those professors learn -- learn from their audience.

MR. LINKER:

That's actually -- it is something we are looking into. A lot of times that falls under the category of something called service learning where you get credit and you learn by actually going out into the community. And some of our honor students are doing just that. And we're looking to kind of dovetail that in with our program as well because why not tap into that other 25,000 wealth of people who can go out there and learn from the residents as the residents learn from them?

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

You know, and in some sense our children seem to have a disconnect with actual -- the physical contact of going somewhere, speaking to someone, you know, more tangible, learning type of technique. This -- you're continuing that or you're doing that with our senior citizens. They're used to that. They were brought up actually being part of the learning process where now our kids basically are in a class of 50 or 60, you know, as they get older in high school. And there seems to be a disconnect. But this is great, though, that you're providing a connection with what our seniors were used to, to what's available today.

And I was at BNL last week and they have a learning program. And it's actually teaching the teachers how to teach what's going on now because there's so much information at your fingertips. I'm just curious what do the audience that you're teaching now, what do they think about the new technology?

MR. LINKER:

Well, they -- they're daunted by it if they're asked to use it. In fact, Cynthia's -- one of her expertise is designing web pages and a lot of things, and, you know, online classes. And we've been a little hesitant to send her out. She in herself is kind of daunting. (Laughter) But also -- to actually put them in front of a computer screen and ask them to, you know, to write in Java or something like that, is terrifying, but they appreciate obviously the technology. Trying to get them to use -- some of them -- I think many of them have never even used a mouse. You know, the idea of clicking is difficult for them as maybe was the case with some -- you know, some of our parents.

MR. PETERMAN:

Just if I can -- if I can add to that, one of the thoughts we had because there are some of our technologists that we would love to go out and maybe talk about how to Facebook with your grandchildren or how to do Facetime or, you know, that kind of thing. So those are things that we're thinking about.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

I just did Facetime with my daughter who's going to college at Hunter College in the City; and I had my eleven-year-old and my twenty-year-old and we were communicating, we were looking at each other and it was new for me. But that's a wonderful idea, again to -- and I think the most important thing if you can -- if you get them comfortable with what they're doing -- because our kids -- our kids, I think, are much more risk takers than the older generation, you know, and more competitive. But if you can educate our senior population to connect with the generation, you know, the newer generation, I think, we'll see more quality in our education, in our communities.

MR. LINKER:

Absolutely.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Does anybody else have a question for our presenters today? No. Legislator Horsley.

LEG. HORSLEY:

I think that's all great stuff. I love it. Dan, let me just offer my -- some day you get stuck and you need a history professor or something like that, have Kevin or somebody call me up, I'll come over and substitute, how's that?

MR. LINKER:

I'm writing your name down now.

LEG. HORSLEY:

Sounds like fun.

MR. PETERMAN:

I appreciate that. We have that in the minutes now. And thank you for that.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Okay. Does anybody else have anything they would like to bring up with our Committee? Okay, I'd like to adjourn the meeting. And have a wonderful week. Thank you.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1:18 PM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**