

Opinion

Page 6 Bristol Phoenix June 26, 2008

EDITORIAL

Charter school vote showed courage

We salute those members of the House who voted last week to end the freeze on charter school development in Rhode Island.

Their overdue action comes as a breath of fresh air in a state whose tendency till now has been to bar the door against educational ideas from other places.

Charter schools offer public school choice, innovation and flexibility to a state that sorely needs all three. Something is amiss in a place where educational spending ranks among the nation's highest but performance rests someplace south of mediocre.

Yet staunch opposition from a teachers' union that, until now has pretty much gotten its legislative way, had effectively banned new charter schools from the Ocean State.

The union argument has been that charter schools siphon precious public money from already underfunded public schools.

But that's not what really irks the union.

What alarms the union is that charter schools have the ability to run things differently — and lo and behold their ways often work wonders.

Charter schools can dispense with such union-driven hallmarks as tenure, seniority, prevailing wage and bumping. Teachers may be paid market wage and rewarded for performance rather than exclusively years on the job. The mayoral academy plan before the legislature offers teachers a choice between the state pension program and the sort of 401k plan to which most in the private sector now participate.

These schools offer administrators the power to administrate, not spend their days placing teachers as contract, not necessarily common sense and talent, dictate — much as private schools have done so well for so long. A gifted history teacher need not fear getting 'bumped' by a more senior teacher whose abilities may lie in other areas.

Along the way these schools debunk a myth — that tampering with these rules will cause good teachers to flee. On the contrary, charter schools are swamped with applications from skilled teachers who appreciate freedom from a system designed to smother change.

And most important, they offer choice to families whose school placement is governed now entirely by address.

If this action enables a healthy competition of educational ideas and ideals, Rhode Island students will be the winners.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bristol Personnel Board dropped the ball

To the editor:

This letter I feel I had to write in regards to the non-fact, baseless, ignorant opinions of people on how the process of selecting a police chief in the Town of Bristol works. First of all, the town administrator has to go by the Town Charter. In regards to the written test, that apparently caused confusion on behalf of the town's personnel board members.

The charter states that the written test for the office of chief of police is worth up to 60 percent of the candidate's overall score. The key words here are "up to" and "overall." Apparently members of the personnel board did not review the charter, or seek the legal advice of the town solicitor, Michael Ursillo.

Instead, they brainstormed and decided that they will certify the list as they see fit. It amuses me that Rosetta Deluca actually thinks she is qualified based on her statement in the Bristol Phoenix on what a individual needs to score on a written test to lead a 38-member police department. Are you aware that several police departments in the state of Rhode Island don't even have a written test for chief of police, including the Rhode Island State Police? How many members of

that fine organization do you think the state police superintendent leads with no written test?

Members of the personnel board are not qualified to pick the leader of a para-military organization such as a police department. Did you know that usually when a chief of police steps down, the next highest ranking officer, in this case Deputy Chief Canario, would be named acting chief during the interim? See, you do learn something new every day, don't you.

The bottom line here is the personnel board has a job to do and that job is to administer a written examination for the office of chief of police. They then, at the completion, are to grade it based on what it says in the town code/charter, not their interpretation of how it should be graded. By their interpretation, maybe we should have graded the oral scores and made them 60 percent.

The oral board was worth 30 percent and 60 percent of 30 is 18. I wonder how many candidates got at least 18 on the oral?

The problem here is they did not seek legal advice from Mr. Ursillo regarding the verbiage in the charter. They went to Earl Sweeney. Well, Mr. Sweeney is not an attorney representing the Town of Bristol. That's a big problem.

The personnel board turned this process into a dog and pony show when there was no need to. Maybe they had their own personal agendas. It's good they resigned. They proved they did not belong there in the first place.

Let me just end this letter by saying the selection of a new police chief is a very lengthy process, and the town administrator went above and beyond her search for a new chief to succeed the well-respected Chief Russell Serpa. Having worked there, I believe Mrs. Mederos made the absolute best choice in selecting Chief Canario.

Chief Canario as the deputy chief, along with Chief Serpa, moved the Bristol Police forward in the last 10 years like none of their predecessors could. The Bristol Police Department at this time is one of the few accredited police agencies in the state of Rhode Island. Chief Canario is not only well-respected in this community, but also throughout the state of Rhode Island and federally.

Michael Serbst
Roslyn Avenue

Mr. Serbst is a retired lieutenant from the Bristol Police Department.

Police chief story had spin all over it

To the editor:

I have just finished reading your two-and-one-half-page article concerning Chief Josh Canario.

This paper never ceases to amaze me. You are masters at taking portions of factual information, putting the "Bristol Phoenix Spin" on it, and passing it off as the whole story. Your editorial was not much better, perhaps because

it may have been done by the same reporter, but let me assure you that I for one and many of the people of Bristol do not feel short-changed by Diane Mederos or by her choice of Josh Canario as our chief.

Performance matters, and our new chief has proven over many years that he is very capable of taking on this enormous responsibility, but does your article

focus on those accomplishments? No, not at all, just on the test score which represented only a portion of the decision. Why, I wonder, was there no balance in your article? Well, I really don't wonder too much, nasty sells newspapers, and that is all that matters.

People serve on boards all the

See **FACING PAGE**

Bristol Phoenix.

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