

Tuesday, April 27, 2021

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEE
OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April
27, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. Present were members Chair Joe Sokolovic, Joseph Lombard, and Sybil Allen. Board member Albert Benejan was present.

Ms. Allen moved to approve the committee's minutes of March 16, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a special education update. Dementred Young, director of social work, made a presentation.

Mr. Young said there were reduced numbers of special education students reported to the state this year compared to last year because it was harder to test kids that were not in school for in-person instruction. He said that testing is now ongoing.

Mr. Young said special education data is presented to the state every October 1st. On October 1, 2020, there were 4,243 special education students; with 467 in ages 3 to 5 and the rest 6 to 21 years. Male students comprise 2,832 of the total. The chart also displayed the racial breakdown.

Mr. Young presented data on the breakdown of special education students by disability, with the majority falling into the learning disability category.

Mr. Sokolovic said in future presentations he would like to see the figures placed next to student demographics. He said the two-thirds receiving special education services being male stood out.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said the categories more likely to lead to out-of-district placements are emotional disturbances and multiple disabilities. He noted out-of-districts placements take place in the least-restrictive environment.

Mr. Young discussed out-of-district placements. He said the figures indicated the numbers have been going down each year from 2018-19. There were 11 students sent out of district this year, which is drastically lower because of Covid. Because students have been in school less they are less apt to show behaviors that lead to out-of-district placements.

Mr. Young displayed a summary of out-of-district placements, totaling 317. He said there are 43 seats for the district for The University School, but only 24 seats are filled. He said those figures only apply to special education students, not those expelled. He said another category is state-approved schools such as CES, ACES, and High Roads.

Mr. Young discussed the amount of special education students in charter schools. The totals were 3,620 students, of which 429 are special education students. He said the district has to provide all charter schools with services such as speech, social work, occupational or physical therapy, and special education.

Mr. Sokolovic noted Bridge Academy has the highest percentage of special education students: 21.69.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said he could look at historical numbers to see if charter schools were deselecting special education students.

Mr. Young displayed a slide that showed the number of special education students has increased since 2011, but it did dip a little bit on 10/1/20.

In response to a question, Mr. Young said he believed the different departments are working more collaboratively to not over-identify students for special education. Mr. Sokolovic said he was always concerned about over-identifying or under-identifying, because each are dangerous to students.

Mr. Young displayed a slides on the special education evaluations. He said evaluations are still ongoing and haven't stopped. He pointed to the great progress in addressing missed reevaluations and initial evaluations.

The next agenda item was a culturally relevancy and science curriculum update. David Henry, district science director, presented on the item.

Mr. Henry said Dr. Morgan helped him take over as science director. He said Portia Scott-Thiam, a teacher, has been assigned to help with science leadership. He said he has created a team and invited anyone with science teaching responsibilities to join.

Mr. Henry discussed the digital science products in the district. The K to 5 level uses the HMH Science Dimensions, which expires in June of 2022. The 6 to 8 level uses iQuest, which is licensed through June 2024.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said the science leadership team has put on professional development. He said this year's sessions has included material on Next General Science Standards presented through Teams. There were other sessions focusing on the digital products.

Mr. Sokolovic said he got involved in the board when there was an attempt to change the science theme at Park City Magnet. He said this led to his recognition of the underrepresentation of minorities in science and STEM. He said he finds science is better in Grades 7 to 12 than K to 5 because of teachers with science degrees in 7 to 12. He said he has observed the lack of science material on K to 5 bulletin boards. He said this leads to the science spark not being lit in young children.

Mr. Henry said he agreed and noted only 12 to 13 percent of students at Aquaculture are city residents. He said he could distribute science material to K to 5 classrooms through the superintendent's office.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said the availability of digital licenses varies by school. He said he was looking to make some changes in the summer.

Mr. Henry said he asked teachers about culturally relevant practices. He read quotes from teachers, which included discussion of genes and pedigrees; sickle cell anemia; an interactive earthquake and volcano map; highlights of STEM in black history and women's history month; racism and sexism in science; and pollution in Bridgeport.

Mr. Henry described the virtual science fair, which included six outside scientists evaluating the projects. He said an

Aquaculture student will participate in an international science fair with a presentation on sharks.

Mr. Henry then discussed future plans. The science revision is on the fiscal schedule for the 2022-23 school year. This summer the curriculum will be reviewed and shored up, along with evaluating digital products.

Mr. Benejan said the plans looked amazing; he asked about costs. Mr. Henry said he believed the costs anticipated are within the parameters given to him by the CFO. Mr. Sokolovic said curriculum is in a renewal cycle as a normal course.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said all Bridgeport students can take courses at Aquaculture, even if they are in another high school. He said the program covers a range of students, from students who want to earn college credits to those who are not interested in college but can get into the marine trades. He said the school included advanced equipment for the study of science. He said because the program is interdistrict there are students of all backgrounds that come together.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said there is no allocation for a PTSO at Aquaculture; there is a parent-student organization, but there has not been in-person interaction during the Covid period. He said going forward it needs to improve. Mr. Benejan said he would be willing to assist with information and help.

Mr. Sokolovic urged board members take a tour of the Aquaculture school to see some of the amazing things there. He said he was surprised to learn how few Bridgeport students are in Aquaculture.

Mr. Henry said he believed we can do a better job of getting the word out for Bridgeport students. He said the fish market at the school is run by a Bassick student. He said at one point almost 50 percent of students were from Bridgeport.

Mr. Henry said Central students come to Aquaculture in the morning; Bassick and Harding students come in the afternoon. Fairfield and Trumbull are the biggest sending towns.

Mr. Henry said there is a video on YouTube about the school created the human resources department.

The next agenda item was an update on the plane being built at Bassick High.

Dr. Joseph Raiola, principal, said the students are having a great time and building relationships with the mentors and instructor. There are about 25 students and 15 mentors involved, including pilots, aviation mechanics, and business owners.

Dr. Raiola displayed an image of the airplane. The organization partnered with is Tango Flight. He said it had been a great experience for the school. The plane will not be finished for a couple more years. He said Steve Blum, the instructor, has been very meticulous about the operation. He said the shop where the plane is being worked on is set up as a first-class shop such as would be used in industry.

Dr Raiola displayed photos of students working on the plane, including extensive riveting. He said the work involved is repetitive, but has to be done meticulously, with a lot of quality control.

Mr. Benejan urged the board members visit Bassick to see the work on the plane and students' interaction with mentors. He asked that Mr. Blum also present to the board in the future.

In response to a question, Dr. Raiola said the focus right now is the hands-on work, not the science of flight and related subjects.

Mr. Sokolovic said this demonstrates when our programs are funded and they have what they need, our kids will go far. Dr. Raiola said he could provide an update in six months with Mr. Blum.

Mr. Benejan described the boo the students use, which includes the technical drawings of the plane.

The next agenda item was on social studies curriculum renewal update.

Chris Johnson said it is intended to develop a culturally responsive curriculum that can be adapted to anything that is happening currently, including shifting away from the way U.S. history has been taught. He said the idea is to get away from Eurocentrism. The concept is to talk about essential questions and big picture questions, so that every student can engage that content from a perspective that engages them and allows them to research.

Mr. Johnson said the history committee has looked at a multitude of resources and vendors, but it was noted there was not enough differentiated reading and ELL support in the products. He said we want students to become

participants in civics and understand how social sciences interact with one another.

Mr. Johnson noted Dr. Jenkins previously presented on Actively Learn. He said it comes with a catalog of content for social studies specifically. He described the resources available on Actively Learn, which has the ability to level to the student's reading level. He said a handful of teachers are piloting Actively Learn in the district currently and their feedback has been sought. He demonstrated how new and current lessons are presented in Actively Learn.

Mr. Johnson displayed the initial quote for Grades 7 to 12 that has been received for Actively Learn licenses: \$4.50 per student, or \$80,000 for two years. He said professional development would be included, along with the ability for district teachers to upload materials and resources for use by other teachers.

In response to a question, Mr. Johnson said he was looking to introduce the resources in the fall. Mr. Sokolovic noted the agenda item was phrased in a way that did not call for action by the committee.

In response to a question, Mr. Johnson said this is part of the social studies curriculum revision cycle. He said textbooks have been found to be not adaptive in this area. He said teachers are rewriting the curriculum to incorporate project-based learning, which put students in a situation to understand what's happening around them. He said Actively Learn is a support to help us to do that.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee members could get more information from the links in the presentation. He suggested

if time was of the essence the next step might be to bring the purchase to the full board without a vote by the committee.

He said he would discuss the timing with Supt. Testani.

Ms. Allen moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the committee on May 25, 2021