

Monday, August 26, 2019

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held August 26, 2019, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Jessica Martinez, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Hernan Illingworth, Chris Taylor, Maria Pereira, and Joseph Lombard. LaMar Kennedy arrived at the meeting subsequently as noted.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

There was a moment of silence for the passing of Charles Tisdale, former mayoral candidate and president of ABCD, Inc.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Phyllis Lingard said she has run youth programming in Bridgeport since 1996. She said she has two grandchildren who had a difficult route to walk to school near Beardsley Park and Old Town Road. She asked the board to think about the trials the kids would face and urged the board to keep the children in a safe environment.

Anthony Marshall of Street Safe Bridgeport and Peace in the Streets said it is completely unsafe for students who are

walking to school. He said he knows how groups and gangs operate and asked everyone to come together to reduce walking distances to a mile for high school students and a half a mile for elementary students.

Samantha Golden said she agreed with the prior speakers. She said kids shouldn't have to deal with the walking issue due to trash on the streets.

Amina Brown encouraged the board to make sure that the money given by the city this year is included in the MBR for next year. She said she was concerned about the city giving line items on how the board should spend it. She urged the community be included in budget conversations early in the process.

Laura Maranon, parent of three girls in the district, said she was very concerned about the walking distance. She recounted an incident where someone was following her daughter while she was walking to school. She asked the board to think about the safety of the children as a priority.

Gabe Burgos, a lifelong resident of Bridgeport, appeared with his 13-year-old daughter. He expressed concerned about the lack of sidewalks on Quarry Road near Fairchild Wheeler. He said there is often panhandling going on at the corner of East Main Street and Old Town Road. He said there is a homeless encampment in the woods on the corner of East Main Street and Broadridge Road. He urged the board think of the students' safety.

Claudia Phillips, a parent leader and resident of Bridgeport, thanked the community members for attending tonight. She thanked the board members for working tirelessly for the benefit of children and families. She asked that the board

accept the money for the buses for this school year and continue negotiations for a permanent increase to the school budget.

Doran Wright, pastor of Neighborhood Church Black Rock, said he was newly on the Bassick High Governance Council. He said he is also a restorative facilitator in the district. He urged the board to keep walking distances as they are currently or reduce them, and not to play political football with our students' safety.

Emily Mazo, a Fairchild Wheeler student, said the change in transportation would negatively impact a lot of students. She said she has to walk for about ten minutes to her bus stop. She said some students lack the motivation to go to school and increased walking distances would make this worse.

Julian Smith said she found out that her ten-year-old daughter had to walk to school. She said according to Google she lives 2.4 miles from school and has to cross busy streets to walk to school. She said she was a single parent and was under stress due to this situation.

Rev. D. Stanley Lord, vice president of the Greater Bridgeport NAACP, asked the board to do better with transportation. He said safety is number one above everything else, especially of children, who are the future of Bridgeport.

JoAnn Kennedy said she was in a precarious position of sticking up for the board because it already voted to put the transportation policies in place. The only question was transportation in next year's budget by putting the cash into the MBR. She said the board is doing the best they can with what the mayor and the City Council gives them.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Illingworth moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 28, 2019. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and approved by a 6-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Weldon, Illingworth, Martinez, Sokolovic, Allen and Lombard. Ms. Pereira and Mr. Taylor abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of June 5, 2019. The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen. Corrections were noted.

The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Sokolovic, Illingworth, Martinez, Weldon, Allen and Lombard. Mr. Taylor abstained.

Ms. Martinez moved approval of the minutes of the regular Meeting of June 10, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth.

Mr. Kennedy arrived at the meeting.

Corrections were noted.

The motion was approved by an 8-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Sokolovic, Illingworth, Martinez, Weldon, Allen, Kennedy, and Lombard. Mr. Taylor abstained.

Ms, Martinez moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of June 11, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and approved by a 7-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Sokolovic, Illingworth, Martinez, Weldon, Allen, Kennedy, and Lombard. Mr. Taylor and Ms. Pereira abstained.

Ms. Martinez moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of June 13, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Sokolovic, Illingworth, Martinez, Weldon, Allen, Kennedy, and Lombard. Mr. Taylor and Ms. Pereira abstained.

Ms. Martinez moved to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of June 24, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth.

The motion was approved by a 7-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Sokolovic, Illingworth, Martinez, Weldon, Allen, Kennedy, and Lombard. Mr. Taylor and Ms. Pereira abstained.

Mr. Illingworth moved to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of June 26, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kennedy.

The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Allen, Illingworth, Weldon, Sokolovic and Kennedy. Members Pereira, Martinez, Lombard and Taylor abstained.

Ms. Martinez moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of July 18, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and approved by a 7-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Kennedy, Sokolovic, Illingworth, Martinez, Weldon, Allen and Lombard. Mr. Taylor and Ms. Pereira abstained.

Mr. Illingworth moved approval of the minutes of the Special Meeting of July 25th, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and approved by a 5-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Sokolovic, Kennedy, Weldon, Allen and Illingworth. Members Pereira, Martinez, Taylor and Lombard abstained.

Mr. Illingworth made a motion *“to move up Items A and B under New Business, rescission of motions taken on June 5th, 2019, regarding elementary and high school transportation walking distances to the next item on the agenda.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen.

Mr. Taylor thanked Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Lombard who did not vote for this originally. He said it was ironic that Mr. Illingworth, who proposed the cuts, was moving for rescission. He said it should never have been done

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next item was rescission of motions taken on June 5th, 2019, regarding elementary and high school walking distances.

Mr. Weldon moved *“to rescind the motions taken on June 5th, 2019, regarding elementary and high school transportation walking distances.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Ms. Pereira said the board voted to return transportation to

the board policy for all schools, including Fairchild Wheeler, on the condition that the mayor transfers the funds to the board to lock it into the MBR. She said the mayor had proposed four straight budgets without one additional dollar for 21,500 students, 88 percent of which are black and brown.

Ms. Pereira said the mayor was only doing this because it is 13 days before the primary and he is in a battle for re-election. She said his plan for next year is that the board does not get that money. She said the mayor and the City Council voted to give the Beardsley Zoo tiger exhibit \$2.5 million in capital funding. She asked why since the zoo was owned by the state we are spending any city dollars on it and the four tigers.

Mr. Illingworth said when originally faced with a \$15 million deficit tough decisions had to be made. He said he made the busing decision without knowing the impact that it was going to cause. He said he would publicly say he was one hundred percent wrong. He said he received numerous calls from parents on this issue. He said he would like the money in the MBR, but it was not going to happen and he would not take the risk. He said the students did not need to walk the extra distance.

Mr. Illingworth said he wanted to warn the community that we may not get this next year. He said we have ten months to deal with it and figure it out. He said he urged the superintendent this year to get the community involved, but action was not taken until August. He said he wanted to apologize to the community.

Mr. Sokolovic said there was no need for Mr. Illingworth to feel guilty for suggesting a cut. He said buses, special

education and personnel are the board's three biggest expenses. He said when we are faced with deficits year after year something has to be cut. He said he would vote tonight to put the buses back in place, but we need to pressure the City Council and the mayor to put it in the MBR. He said we are putting ourselves in deficit for \$1.65 million for money that is not guaranteed next year. He said without an election, the pressure would be off the mayor for four years.

Ms. Martinez said we did a great job reaching out to the community during budget season. She said we need to be involved all year round. She said the public does not understand the difficulties the board faces year to year. She said Mr. Testani had made strides in building relationships with the city administration. She urged accepting this for now while continuing to work on the budget.

Ms. Martinez said she would vote to rescind the decision and keep the budget as the acting superintendent presented to us.

Mr. Taylor said he was a Republican and believed in organized labor. He said the board held firm and we found miraculously \$5 million. He said the board was successful because it stood up and said no more cuts. He said he was not blaming anybody, but you have to take a stand when your job is morally or ethically wrong. He said he believed no child should be walking in Bridgeport due to safety concerns. He said he had met with Anthony Marshall and Rev. Lord on this subject.

Ms. Pereira said the board voted 7-1 to rescind the transportation decisions on the condition that every dollar be transferred into our budget. She said the mayor and City Council could not circumvent the board and pay vendors

directly. She said the mayor and City Council members running for election are using the children as a prop.

Ms. Pereira asked Mr. Weldon if he circumvented the board and directly communicated with We Transport and had individual conversations with board members. Mr. Weldon denied he did so.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the city's response was no to the request to include the expenditures in the MBR. He said he recommended rescinding the transportation vote for the '19-20 year and the board would not have to cut it next year if there was a discussion where a third-party source came forward and paid it.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the line item in the budget would be reflected as a credit from the bus company.

Mr. Sokolovic said the board should consider legal action after the vote to make sure the money is included in the MBR.

Ms. Pereira said the policy was clear that every high school student has to walk within two miles. She said she understood twenty buses had been reinstituted at Fairchild Wheeler under the direction of Mr. Testani.

Mr. Testani said no buses could be reinstituted until the vote takes place. He said we are reverting back to the situation in 2018-19 regarding students receiving buses. Ms. Pereira said there is no policy that Fairchild Wheeler students get treated differently.

Ms. Martinez moved to call the question. The motion was

seconded by Ms. Allen. There was a voice vote with only ayes sounded.

Mr. Testani said the transportation polices are being restored to '18-'19. He said he was not the superintendent then.

Ms. Martinez said Ms Pereira had a personal vendetta against Fairchild Wheeler. Ms. Pereira said it was about treating all students equitably.

The motion was approved by a 7-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Martinez. Illingworth, Lombard, Allen, Sokolovic and Taylor. Mr. Kennedy and Ms. Pereira were opposed.

Ms. Martinez moved "*for rescission of motions taken on August 19, 2019, regarding the '19-'20 budget.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor.

Ms. Martinez moved to call the question. The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Illingworth said there had been an hour's discussion on the budget at the last meeting. He suggested there be a motion to move the question.

Mr. Weldon said a yes vote is rescinding all the budget actions taken at the meeting last week.

Ms. Allen said Black Rock seems to be receiving preferential treatment regarding pre-K cuts.

Mr. Testani said he investigated the rosters of the pre-K classes at Black Rock. He said it was a misconception that well-to-do parents have their children in those classes .He

said 90 percent of those students are black and brown and 90 percent live on the other side of Fairfield Avenue in multi-family homes. He said these were working families that need the pre-K classes.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said there were only three students enrolled at Wilbur Cross pre-K and there were community slots available for them. He said both classes at Black Rock are at maximum capacity.

Ms. Allen said there should be outreach to let parents know slots are available. Mr. Testani said Ms. Peloso and Dr. Jenkins had definitely addressed recruiting in the past few years.

In response to a question, Ms. Martinez said she was willing reverse the cut to the TAG program, however, the superintendent understands her frustration about the removal. Mr. Testani said the situation is being addressed. He said it was a bilingual TAG position and it would be a challenge to find a teacher.

Ms. Pereira said we can find kids in Black Rock to fill a pre-K classroom, but not in a school located in an impoverished area. She said the kids at Fairchild Wheeler were also receiving preferential treatment.

The motion was approved by a 6-3 vote. Voting in favor were members Lombard, Illingworth, Allen, Martinez, Taylor, and Weldon. Voting opposition were members Kennedy, Sokolovic and Pereira.

Ms. Martinez moved "*for Item C to be considered next on the agenda.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor.

The motion was approved by an 8-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Martinez, Taylor, Allen, Lombard, Kennedy, Sokolovic and Weldon. Ms. Pereira was opposed.

The next agenda item was the adoption of a balanced 2019-20 budget.

Ms. Martinez said her only issue last week was the TAG teacher at Marin School. She said there should be a huge push to fill that position because all schools should have access to the program.

Ms. Martinez moved *“to accept the budget as is proposed by our acting superintendent and our CFO, Marlene Siegel.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Lombard noted the money was not coming into the district, but it was a credit from the bus company. Mr. Testani said the TAG bilingual teacher position will be posted. He said he would work with Ms. Siegel on other ways to fund the position.

Mr. Lombard said the majority of the items on the budget should not come to the board on a line by line basis. He said the board should be voting on policy.

The motion was approved by 6-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Lombard, Allen, Taylor, Martinez and Illingworth.

Voting in opposition was Ms. Pereira. Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Sokolovic abstained.

Ms. Pereira said the board was supposed to vote by today on which superintendent search firm was going to be

engaged. She said the bids came in on July 8th and Mr. Weldon had not called a meeting.

Mr. Weldon asked for suggestions on when to hold a meeting on this.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Mr. Illingworth said the next Facilities Committee meeting would be scheduled soon for a day next week.

Ms. Martinez reported on the Finance Committee. She said she was excited that the board had a balanced budget. She said the next committee meeting would be on September 11th.

Mr. Sokolovic asked the Finance Committee look at anticipated personnel costs for the 2020-21 school year. Ms. Siegel said that information would not be available until November.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching & Learning Committee would meet on September 17th.

Ms. Pereira asked why the professional services for expelled services had not come through the committee. Mr. Sokolovic said no bid responses were received. Mr. Weldon said The University School was engaged to negotiate a renewal of the contract. He said time was of the essence. Mr. Testani said some students were continuing their expulsions into the new school year.

Mr. Testani said the only caveat is The University School will not accept students below Grade 7, which is why they didn't bid.

Mr. Weldon said the Personnel Committee met several times over the summer to conduct interviews for principal and assistant principal positions. The next meeting will be on September 17th.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee met to discuss nutrition bids and no-bid contracts. The next meeting will be on September 19th.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Ad Hoc Committee on Great City Schools/Males of Color did not meet over the summer. The next meeting will be on September 24th. He said he was promised the white paper by the committee at the end of the summer.

The next item was discussion and possible approval of MOUs regarding math teachers at Central High teaching a sixth period for the 2019-20 school year.

Mr. Testani said Mr. Graf indicated there were no candidates to fill two math positions. Mr. Graf requested reaching out to other teachers in the math department to teach a 6th period; an MOU with the BEA would be needed. Mr. Testani said it saves the district money and keeps a certified math teacher in those classrooms.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said Fairchild Wheeler currently has one math vacancy, while Bassick, BMA and Harding are fully staffed.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said Teach for America did not have candidates for the board at the time the contract with them was finalized. Teachers were placed in other districts.

Mr. Testani said he was confident this is the best way to go, and he would recommend it to Fairchild Wheeler if it's feasible with their schedule. He said the payments were pensionable. He said the teachers give up their supervision period to teach the class.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible approval of MOU regarding athletic directors. Ms. Pereira said the board members did not receive the MOU in their packets. Mr. Testani said he could provide the MOU at the next meeting. He said there were no changes to the MOU from last school year.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to postpone to the next Regular Meeting.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and was approved by an 8-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Sokolovic, Kennedy, Weldon, Illingworth, Martinez, Allen and Lombard. Mr. Taylor was opposed.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action on renewal of agreement with The University School for alternative educational services for expelled students.

Mr. Testani said this was a pressing issue with students that need to attend beginning Thursday. He said The University School was willing to discuss a continuation of the contract minus the K-6 component. He said there was only one sixth grade student last year who met the criteria. Other alternatives will be sought should that arise again.

Mr. Taylor said The University School had been with us for forty years. He said we have not been equitable in these contracts to people in our community. He mentioned the name of Kevin Muhammad.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the bid was on BidSync and there were no responses. He said he reached out to The University School since they were the current provider and asked them to continue for another year at the current rate.

Ms. Martinez said we can't do anything about the fact that nobody bid on this, but she was not happy about having to make these decisions at the last minute. She said restorative practices were needed for expelled students.

Ms. Pereira said it's appalling that two days before school we were just figuring out where our students were going.

Mr. Kennedy moved "*to approve the agreement with The University School.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Mr. Taylor said as the status quo continues in Bridgeport certain people of color seem to be left behind.

Mr. Testani said we should begin to put out an RFP for the next school year very soon. He said he did not believe this was the most ideal situation.

Mr. Illingworth moved the question. The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor. The motion was approved by an 8-1 vote.

Voting to close the question were members Kennedy,

Sokolovic, Weldon, Taylor, Illingworth, Weldon, Allen and Lombard

Ms. Pereira was opposed.

The vote on the motion was 7-2 in favor. Voting in favor were members Pereira, Kennedy, Sokolovic, Weldon, Martinez, Allen and Lombard.

Mr. Taylor and Mr. Illingworth were opposed.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Approved by the board on September 23, 2019