

Friday, March 5, 2021

MINUTES OF THE AD HOC DISTRICTWIDE BRANDING INITIATIVE COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 5, 2021, by video conference call, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m.

Committee members present were Chair Bobbi Brown, Sosimo Fabian, and Albert Benejan. Board members Sybil Allen and Joseph Sokolovic were present. Board member John Weldon joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

The sole agenda was on the committee's goals and objectives.

Dr. Fabian said he was particularly interested in highlighting the many good things going on in the district, which he believes the public at large does not have an understanding of. He said the initials BPT could be used as part of a phrase "Be Proud To..."

Mr. Weldon joined the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said he believed the time has come for this idea, which he viewed as selling Bridgeport Public Schools as a product. He said trust had to be built. He said open communications were needed so people can trust us. He said since logos are being looked at it would be a good idea to get students involved in submitting proposals.

Mr. Weldon said branding is more than just a logo, but includes how the organization is presented to the public, including all communications and social media. He said he

liked the logo developed with Every Kid, Every Day. He said to distribute a logo widely through buildings could be expensive and might have to be done on a gradual basis. He said there could be a plan to get a certain image out there. He said the hiring of a branding expert or a social media manager could be considered.

Mr. Weldon suggested the district consider a standardized staff summary to be distributed to the board prior to meetings. He said the same approach to standardized methods of communication could also be used between the district or the board and parents to avoid sending different messages.

Ms. Brown said she was also interested in what potential costs might be. She said another thing that could be looked at is how the board communicates with members of the public who contact board members. She noted there was a generation divide in the age of district parents.

In response to a question, Jeffrey Postolowski, director of ITS, said currently Tim Grasty in the superintendent's office does the direct dispatch of information on Twitter and Facebook. He said large broadcasts to families are done by School Messenger. He said there are newer products to communicate with parents on the market. He said he said Bloomz and Parent Square allow communications with various groups of people across social media and other platforms. He said most of the districts are moving to these unified communications platforms.

Mr. Postolowski said the district held a branding contest two to three years ago and the logo developed was done with official fonts and colors.

Mr. Weldon said he preferred the logo associated with Every Kid, Every Day to the logo with graduates going up the steps. He said the committee could explore how to expand on the logo.

Mr. Postolowski said in order to use the newer logo it might have to be licensed since it uses pre-produced art. He said there are companies that will develop logos for pennies on the dollar that can be customized. He said the current logo was developed by Mr. Porto of the IT department into a Vector graphic over two and a half days, which made it the district's intellectual property. He said the logo was developed after a contest coordinated by Alisha Robinson, the arts director, and the board ratified the eventual choice. He said once the logo was established, everything was branded with that logo, including on devices.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said up until a few years ago the district's logo was the city's seal until it was replaced by the logo with students going up the stairs, and then the Every Kid, Every Day was a subsequent campaign. He said he could provide the visuals to the committee. He suggested speaking to Ms. Robinson about the issue due to her connections and talent.

Mr. Weldon said another possibility was establishing a way to standardize communications – internal, external, and publicity. Ms. Brown noted prior discussions about responses by board members to the public and parents.

Mr. Weldon said a policy could be considered to establish how public inquiries are responded to and who does the responding. He said his typical response to public inquiries is to thank the person and say he will bring it to the attention of the superintendent.

Mr. Benejan said people often think that board members can answer all questions or fix every issue brought to them. Ms. Brown said she also forwards issues brought to her by the public to the superintendent. She said a uniform way of responding might prevent board members responding to parents in different ways. Mr. Sokolovic said often members of the public who reach out are asking about things that could be resolved by a principal at the building level.

Mr. Sokolovic said we should look at the optimal balance between providing information to parents and oversaturation of messages with up to six or seven phone blasts a day. He said the problem is often compounded when messages are received for several children in the household.

Mr. Postolowski said a unified communications platform would address this. He said there are ways of adjusting School Messenger so it doesn't send multiple copies of messages. He added that tech savvy parents could put an app on their phone to funnel their messages to the app in place of phone calls, which would empower the parent to make the decision on the best way to contact them. He said he was challenged himself by receiving messages from three different school districts.

Mr. Postolowski said the district was already in the process of other options than School Messenger to be more effective at communication. He said with apps like Bloomz or Parent Square also make direct communication with teachers is much easier.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said IT can access delivery responses statistics to communications, but the tracking mechanism on School Messenger is very

lackluster. He said more up-to-date apps have better tracking mechanisms.

Ms. Brown said the issues going forward seem to be a discussion of the logo, a branding strategy, a unified communications platform, and suggestions on improved communications by the board to those who inquire.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said the default for parents in the district in School Messenger is to receive messages and they would have to make a selection to opt out.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said a big push is mad each year for parents to update their contact in Power School.

Ms. Brown suggested next month's meeting be held on April 9th.

Mr. Benejan moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown an unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod