

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

MINUTES OF THE CONTRACTS COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 16, 2022, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon and Joe Lombard*. Board members Albert Benejan and Joe Sokolovic were also present. Member Christine Baptiste-Perez arrived subsequently as noted.

(*remote participation)

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Lombard moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of September 23, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Weldon. The motion was approved by a 1-0 vote. Mr. Weldon voted in favor. Mr. Lombard abstained.

The next agenda item was on awarding a contract to install new weight room equipment at Central High School.

Tony Pires of the business office said this was an item put out for an RFQ. There were two responses. The lowest price was submitted by Total Fitness, \$126,488, with the other bidder at approximately \$130,000.

Supt. Testani said Central High was renovated as new and things were removed from the budget during the process. He said he realized the weight room had donated items that came from another high school, including a lot that was not able to be used or repaired. He said a better facility was

needed for students in athletics and physical education classes. He said Mr. Cadelina, the assistant principal and former football coach, was the point person to work with the vendors, who will also remove and dispose of the old equipment.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez joined the meeting.

Mr. Lombard moved “*to refer this item to the full board for final approval.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on issuance of an RFP for special education auditing services. Supt. Testani said it was more of a review and audit. He said it is prudent to have an outside entity do a review of special education every few years. He said it hasn't done been in the district in a long time. He said a deep, outside assessment would be useful. The likely time frame would be six to eight months, and include talk with focus groups, information gathering, and a final report.

The superintendent said this would be a roadmap on how to improve services for most vulnerable students. He said the last time this had been done was anywhere from six years to a decade ago. He said in a district this size it probably should be done every five years. He said he believed there would probably be a nationwide response to the RFP.

In response to a question, the superintendent said he believed the last time a review was done it was by CES (*sic*). He said it would be good to open it up and to companies that do this alone. Mr. Pires said he believed there was an RFP issued under Supt. Rabinowitz and the vendor was selected.

Mr. Pires said the RFP is written in a fashion that respondents can be interviewed, and the expectations be set where we want it to be.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said these reviews are not required by the state, but the district had been cited in state complaints on special education. He said as the number of students with IEP grows, this will give us an idea of what we're doing well and lead to greater consistency, while identifying weak spots. He said he did not believe the district will ever be able to get to the level of staffing other districts have, which makes something like this important.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the company will not be embedded in classrooms looking at instruction or speaking to children. Mr. Sokolovic noted the lack of a provision on insurance regarding molestation. Mr. Weldon suggested either it be explicitly stated that there would be no contact with children or if it is possible, that the insurance would need to be provided. He said the same provisions should be applied to background checks.

Mr. Sokolovic said the outside entity would have access to data. Supt. Testani said the agreement entered into will be reviewed by counsel. Mr. Pires said that could be included in the contract.

Mr. Lombard moved "*to recommend to the full board that we issue this RFP.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Weldon and unanimously approved.

Subsequently, Supt. Testani said the RFP for special education review was issued exactly eight years ago this month. The vendor was CREC, not CES.

The next agenda item was on an RFP for student transportation services.

Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said the current transportation contract with We Transport will expire on June 30, 2022. She said this was a three-year agreement. She said the city administrative team was approached to ask if they would consider allowing the board to consider a proposal from We Transport for an extension of the current contract, provided it was cost-effective and cost-efficient. However, despite best efforts, the city declined the request and said there could not be an exception to the city charter.

Ms. Siegel said we are allowed to include in the new RFP a provision that would allow for a three-year agreement to four or five years. This is possible because it is expected the city will present to the City Council a proposal to modify the city charter to allow five-year contracts.

Ms. Siegel said the RFP is in the standard template and has been reviewed by the office of legal services.

Supt. Testani said he was concerned to see what the numbers are going to be. He said a neighboring school district went out to bid and received two bids that were 13 percent and 23 percent higher.

Mr. Weldon said hopefully the existence of a couple of option years will motivate the proposers to give an efficient proposal. He because it is a proposal, a negotiation of the final number can take place with whoever is selected.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said a big concern is that companies that respond have the capability of handling

the volume, with the quality and service we've been accustomed to receive. He said there are a few potential companies available. He said BidSync is the primary advertising vehicle, but it can also be advertised in transportation periodicals as well. He said he believed the companies will know about it because the current contract is \$22 million annually.

Mr. Pires said it needed to be vetted out by May at the latest.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said We Transport has been the vendor for about 12 to 13 years. Mr. Weldon said Laidlaw, a national company, was the prior vendor.

Supt. Testani said We Transport did not let the district down in transportation issues during the pandemic.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said it would definitely not be economical for the district to provide its own transportation services.

Mr. Weldon noted a new player would have to make a significant investment in this area and it could affect their pricing. Mr. Pires said Laidlaw was the prior provider for quite a long time. Mr. Weldon said prior to that it was Chestnut Hill. He said the companies seem to go for 10 to 15 years and then there is an upset. Christine Baptiste-Perez said it may be due for an upset.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said he believed there was a good possibility of the change to the city charter because the three-year limitation is causing a hardship in the issuance of RFPs. Ms. Siegel said it was to the advantage of the city and board for a revision to the city charter in being able to negotiate the best rates.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the city clerk can alert the board when the matter comes on an agenda so advocacy could take place. Ms. Siegel said some city contracts have already been extended from three years to four or five years. It was not allowed with We Transport because they have been the vendor for a long period of time.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved “*to refer this to the full board for approval to issue.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was to award a contract for athletic training services.

Mr. Weldon said the board approved issuing the RFP. Mr. Pires said there was only response to the RFP, by Select Physical Therapy. He said this is another case where city purchasing ordinance require us to rebid because of the expiration of the contract.

Mr. Pires said this is a specific type of service for athletic events where a trainer needs to be present at every game in case of an injury. He said the service has been carried on on a monthly basis until we could get respondents.

Supt. Testani said this is an example of a case where because we couldn't extend the contract, the price went up.

Mr. Pires said the proposed contract is for three years, with options for extension. He said he believed their prior price was \$120,000 per year, which is now increased to \$130,000. He said the services will be the same for the new amount.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said there were a lot of views of the RFP on BidSync, but there was still only one bid. Mr. Weldon said sometimes the viewers are so-called clipping services that go all over, and they bring the RFPs back to clients to see if they're interested.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said the updated RFP should include the background checks and molestation insurance.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said there was a shortage of trainers for the fall sports. He said RFPs can be issued as often as we like, but the need is always going to be there. Certain services lead to limited responses to RFPs.

Supt. Testani said part of the issue is that other districts offer more sports and athletic teams, which makes things more attractive for the vendors.

James Denton, director of adult education, said the contract is for three athletic trainers, one for each high school, for three years, at \$130,000 per year. He said the increase was about \$15,000 per year.

Mr. Denton said he believed the labor shortage impacted the lack of responses to the RFP.

Mr. Weldon said that when he has issued solicitations that have small responses, he calls companies that he knows would typically bid and ask if there are reasons why they did not submit. He said in these types of instances it might be good to call potential vendors who looked at the RFP on BidSync and a common thread might be found.

Supt. Testani said he appreciated the feedback. He said Mr. Denton is helping out in the process here. He said the district does not have an individual with that time to make calls. He noted the district's athletic director position was removed. He said he was looking at reinstating the position with the federal dollars now available. He said there was a lack of leadership in the area of districtwide athletics.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said surrounding districts have the same problem and have hired trainers directly on their staff. He said that could be looked at down the road. The superintendent said it is easier when a district only has one high school.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said the \$130,000 covers ten months.

In response to a question, Mr. Denton said the difficulty with the district hiring trainers is that the only hours they are needed at are the hours after school. He said three part-time trainers would be needed.

Supt. Testani said the vendor provides physical therapy, with the employees doing the training service as part of their jobs.

Mr. Denton said the vendor has been a good group and there have not been any issues with them.

Mr. Lombard moved "*to refer to the full board to award a contract for the athletic services.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Baptiste-Perez and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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