

Thursday, July 29, 2021

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July 29, 2021, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. Present were members Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard, Chris Taylor, Joseph Sokolovic, and Albert Benejan. Sybil Allen arrived subsequently as noted.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

The sole agenda item was discussion of performance and employment of superintendent and discussion and possible action of resulting possible modification of superintendent's employment agreement.

Mr. Weldon said he passed out the final performance evaluation, which now includes input from Ms. Allen. In response to a question, board members indicated they had nothing further to discuss beyond last week. Mr. Weldon said the document was now posted online on the district's website.

Mr. Weldon said there was discussion last week of whether or not Supt. Testani should receive a reward for his performance over the past year.

Board members indicated a desire to discuss the matter in public. Mr. Weldon said he was aware of Facebook chatter

about the residency of the superintendent, which was not intended to be discussed tonight, but the discussion is based on a fiscal reward for a job well done.

Mr. Taylor asked there be a moment of silence for the passing of Dr. Juan Lopez. Supt. Testani said Dr. Lopez was former principal of Elias Howe School, assistant superintendent of the district, and went on to be superintendent of the state vocational-technical system. He said he did extensive work at Brown University and UCLA. He said he was an amazing person who touched many people's lives in the community. He said he considered him a close friend and mentor.

Mr. Taylor asked that the board terminate immediately any relationship with People's Bank. He said Mayor Ganim removed \$30 million from the bank.

Mr. Taylor said he was told there would be an attempt to change the superintendent's residency requirement, so he voiced his opinion on social media.

Mr. Weldon said the banking matter was not an agenda item. The superintendent said the athletic checking account is with People's Bank.

Mr. Weldon noted most board members ranked the superintendent high on their performance evaluations, with the average being 4.44 out of 5.

Mr. Taylor said the board should take special consideration for what the superintendent dealt with during the pandemic. He said he did a phenomenal job; got beat up along the way; held a steady course; and kept as many people happy as possible. He suggested a \$30,000 pay increase. He said he

did not agree with the superintendent's labor relations policies with noncertified employees. Mr. Weldon said that would represent a 12 percent increase.

Mr. Taylor said it was time to ante up after board took a shot with him and with him being underpaid.

Mr. Sokolovic said he agreed the superintendent did a great job in the pandemic, but every superintendent in the state and country have brought their districts through the pandemic. He said the Stamford superintendent took a two-year pay freeze and Greenwich gave a two percent increase. He said the staff worked very hard through the pandemic. He questioned whether they would receive a 13 percent increase. He said this was fiscally unachievable. He said the amount should be more in line or in the ballpark of what workers get.

Mr. Weldon said Supt. Testani makes on the lower end of superintendent pay for districts this size. He said the superintendent came in as a beginner and proved himself as capable as his peers. He said he did not object to a 12 percent increase.

Mr. Taylor said Mr. Sokolovic made some good points, but we're not evaluating the teachers, NAGE or BCAS.

Mr. Weldon reported that Dr Fabian, who could not attend tonight, asked that his recommendation be communicated, which is that he would not support more than a 3.5 percent increase because of labor agreements.

Supt. Testani said Stamford's superintendent total package was \$319,000, with a base pay of \$265,000. Norwalk's superintendent's pay was just increased to \$302,000.

Mr. Taylor moved “*to increase the superintendent’s salary by \$30,000 per year.*”

Ms. Allen arrive at the meeting.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to amend the motion that it be contingent on Mr. Testani establishing bona fide residency in the city of Bridgeport.

Mr. Taylor said he believed the superintendent was living in Bridgeport. Mr. Weldon said the amendment was not allowed since this was a merit increase. Mr. Sokolovic said it was a provision in the employment agreement. Mr. Weldon said the increase could not be held up based on that. Mr. Sokolovic asked that the board’s attorney be consulted.

The motion was not seconded.

Ms. Brown asked what other options the board had for the salary amount. Mr. Weldon said the board can do whatever it wants in that regard.

Mr. Weldon said the motion was to change Mr. Testani’s base salary, retroactive to July 1, to a total of \$275,000.

The motion was approved by a 6-1 vote . Voting in favor were members Weldon, Brown, Taylor, Lombard, Allen, and Benejan. Voting in opposition was Mr. Sokolovic.

Mr. Sokolovic said the reason for his opposition was that Mr. Testani does deserve a raise for a fine job, but we should

put a restriction based on residency in Bridgeport and because the percentage is way too high for a district that is low on funds. He said every time we cut a program of this size this will probably be brought up.

Ms. Brown noted there was no proposal between 3.5 percent and 12 percent. Mr. Weldon said because the superintendent is on the low end of the superintendent salaries in the region and that he proved himself as every bit as capable as seasoned superintendents during the pandemic that that warranted the level of pay increase. He noted every year is a different set of circumstances.

In response to a comment, Supt. Testani said he was not requesting any other change in his contract.

Mr. Weldon described this as an amendment to the contract, which will be drafted by the attorney and have executed.

Mr. Taylor moved that the meeting be adjourned. The notion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod