

Wednesday, September 18, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held September 18, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:42 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic and LaMar Kennedy. Board member Maria Pereira was present.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Kennedy moved approval of the minutes of June 17, 2019. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on converting from a point system to Carnegie units for credits earned.

Mr. Testani said it was not necessarily an item requiring board action, but he would like board support. He said the point system used for credits in the district is not used by most other school districts in the country. He said after conferring with high school administration and data management the conversion to Carnegie units would be a simple fix. He said when transcripts are sent to or from the district the credits will be easily converted.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said most students need 22.5 credits to graduate, however, state law now requires 25 credits for the Class of 2023.

Mr. Testani said an upcoming issue will be creating new opportunities for students to gain additional credits.

Mr. Sokolovic noted it would be easier for colleges when dealing with Bridgeport students.

Mr. Testani said the NCAA Clearing House is based on credits, not on points. He said he would like to implement the change immediately.

Mr. Testani said he was not requesting action by the committee.

The next item was on adult education credits for graduation to reflect increasing credits required for high school graduation. Mr. Testani said the current state requirement is 200 points or 20 credits. The number will increase in increments over the next few years due to new legislation.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the amount of credits needed for adult education graduation is lower because there is no language, physical education or health requirements. He said other districts have increased the amount of credits needed to get ahead of the possibility of students leaving high school early to try to find an easier route to graduation. He said most districts required 220 points or 22 credits prior to the increase in the state graduation requirements.

Mr. Testani said the change was not codified in board policy and was brought to the committee out of common courtesy.

The next agenda item was special education data and baseline review. John Oddo, executive director of specialized instruction, was present.

Mr. Oddo reported there were currently 4,175 special education students in the district. He said 72 percent of students who went through the process up to PPT-2 qualified for special education services. He said the reason some of those students did not qualify was because of the results of testing.

Mr. Oddo said the data reporting system is called SEDAC, which is the district's connection to the state Department of Education.

Mr. Oddo said a lot of special education referrals come from birth to three. Most of the students in this category are labeled as developmental delay until they turn six, at which time they go through assessments to see if they qualify under another disability.

Mr. Oddo said he is concentrating on supports this year, with four coaches and the directors of psychology, social work and speech and language getting into the schools to work with the teams on SRBI interventions, gathering of data and progress monitoring techniques and strategies. He described a program at Bridgeport Learning Center for kindergarten and first grade students who begin to struggle, but have yet to enter into the referral process.

Mr. Oddo said he was emphasizing a checklist for consistent PPT meetings.

Mr. Oddo provided an update on special education complaints.

One was a violation of IDEA by not providing extended school year services. He said the decision was made outside

of the PPT. The district owes the student six hours of compensatory reading instruction.

In response to a question, Mr. Oddo said he did not recall which school this happened at. He said attorneys were not involved in this case and the parent is okay with compensatory reading instruction. He said the PPT checklist will include a discussion of extended school year.

In response to a question, Mr. Oddo said the parent discussed the situation with building administration and then made the complaint directly with the state. He said there was confusion at the PPT between the extended school year program and a summer reading program.

Another complaint requested an impartial due process hearing. It alleged that a Harding student who graduated had an inadequate IEP to meet their education needs and after taking placement tests at Housatonic Community College the student learned he did not have the skills needed to attend the school. He said the case is being handled by Attorney Marsha Moses.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was concerned about special education students not getting services after the budget discussion about reducing special education expenditures. He said it is often cheaper to provide services children are entitled to rather than go through the complaint process.

Mr. Testani said we should not even consider cutting services that students qualify for.

Mr. Kennedy said it seemed like in this case the case manager dropped the ball. Mr. Testani said there was training provided to all administrators in August and special

education case managers will be provided with training by the state over the next several months.

Ms. Pereira said she would like a copy of the guidelines that Ms. Siegel said were going to be instituted to save money. She said the district spent a fortune in litigation over what Supt. Vallas did. She said she was concerned about the forecast of saving \$1.1 million.

Mr. Testani said sometimes Ms. Siegel's language is more of the financial world and not in the educational world. He said he understood guidelines to mean people are following the law.

Mr. Kennedy said he understood the guidelines to be a set of instructions on what to do in given circumstances.

Mr. Sokolovic said sometimes parents are able to get special education services for their child that they are not entitled to.

Ms. Pereira said last year the board received data of PPT referrals broken down by school. She suggested providing training to the schools with a high referral rate. Mr. Oddo said it was a valid point.

Mr. Testani said it was also a general education problem, but a lot of times students are not receiving interventions and things go right to PPT. He said work is being done with principals in this area because a systemic attack was needed.

Mr. Testani said the Bridgeport Learning Center(BLC) is being under-utilized. He said he had received pushback from BLC about placing students in the program by claiming the program was full.

Ms. Pereira said one of the BLC's greatest strengths is the staff-to-student ratio, which leads to transitioning students out. Mr. Testani said the program was not transitioning students out as well as they could be. He said a program was found with one teacher working with only three students. He said such a class should have twelve students in each semester. He said the principal should be soliciting students that require early intervention from their colleagues.

Mr. Testani said BLC had a great teacher-to-student ratio, but there is truancy in some of the program, which reduces the number of students being serviced.

Mr. Testani described the attendance procedures used for truancy that was followed. He noted the shortage of staff in the district. Mr. Sokolovic said there was a lot of passing the baton to people who aren't even there to grab it.

Mr. Testani said if the district had an attendance liaison in every school there would be a huge impact.

Mr. Oddo reported the district ended last year with 396 students in out-of-district placements. This year began with 347 students. He said the other 49 have either graduated or transitioned into the district.

Mr. Oddo reported there were issues with obtaining Medicaid reimbursements for out-of-district placements, He said the district may be losing out on about \$500,000. He said the issue arises because the out-of-district providers are not always logging in the services they provide. He said a contract addendum has been instituted for the providers to address this.

Mr. Oddo said the goal was to hold the out-of-district providers accountable this year.

Mr. Sokolovic said because these services were so costly some providers might see them as profit centers. Mr. Oddo noted the district holds the PPTs for the students and it was the role of the outside provider to fill in the gaps needed. Mr. Testani said when a child becomes successful out of district parents are hesitant to give that up. He added the \$500,000 is an estimate, but the true figure could not be calculated. Mr. Oddo said the money could not be recouped at this point.

The next agenda item was on the translation contract.

Ana Sousa-Martins, director of bilingual education and world languages, said she was requesting permission to add another translation company to the approved company. She said seven bids were received from the RFP. She noted Linguistica International had received the highest score from the district committee.

Ms. Pereira and Mr. Sokolovic noted the board never took a vote to authorize the contract. Ms. Pereira said the board had not done what it was supposed to do.

Ms. Sousa-Martins said there was a service agreement with Linguistica based on last year.

Mr. Sokolovic said the mistakes in the scoring the bids were the same and consistent so it should not affect the outcome. He suggested bringing the matter to the full board.

Ms. Sousa-Martins said she had rectified a few issues with Linguistica, which were resolved by March of last year. She

said Shoreline Interpretation was used for Spanish translation. She said this company only provides Spanish services. She said Shoreline was highly effective last year as reported by administrators and was most cost-effective for Spanish.

Ms. Sousa-Martins said she would like to propose Shoreline for Spanish services and Linguistica for languages other than Spanish.

Ms. Pereira said she wanted to see the three top-rated bids. She said the Linguistica bid did not include sign language. She also expressed concern about the high cost of transcripts.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he would be meeting with Atty. Moses and Ms. Sousa-Martins on strategy for dealing with issues regarding Make the Road.

In response to a question, Ms. Sousa-Martins said at least 80 percent of translation services are in Spanish. She said Shoreline was able to handle the volume of work in Spanish.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*to push the whole RFP process to the full board.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Kennedy and unanimously approved

Mr. Kennedy moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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