

Tuesday, April 14, 2020

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held April 14,
2020, by video and audio conference call, Bridgeport,
Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:39 p.m. Present were Chair John Weldon, Secretary Bobbi Brown, Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Albert Benejan, and Joseph Lombard.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Weldon said according to the governor's executive order the documents being referenced in the meeting are available to the public on the board's internet home page.

The first agenda item was on a memorandum of agreement with UConn for an integrated multitier system of support project in K-2 reading and behavior supports.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins presented on this subject. She said the agreement will provide students, teachers and administrators with an opportunity to receive professional development and coaching support from UConn over five years. The first year would consist of a research project across ten schools in the district.

Dr. Jenkins said about 108 classrooms would be involved at the ten largest schools in the district. She said the cost to the district at this time would be primarily time due to the use of professional development and school improvement days for the coaching sessions.

Mr. Testani said the agreement was reviewed by the board's attorneys and UConn's attorneys, including in regard to student privacy. Dr. Jenkins said the federal government has funded the same program in Texas, Colorado, Kansas, and Massachusetts. She said it was equivalent to what the district calls SRBI.

Ms. Allen, Mr. Benejan, and Ms. Brown asked that they be provided with written materials about the program.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said principals have discussed the possibility of this partnership with teachers. She said Winthrop School teachers reached out about it. She said teachers' participation would be voluntary and if there were not enough volunteers at a particular school that school would not be able to participate.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said the two full-day trainings would be conducted virtually due to the pandemic. She said the on-site meetings would be held once monthly when the partnership begins. Mr. Testani said he believed the costs of paying teachers to attend additional professional development for this program would be minimal.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said reading data from the new assessment tool DIBELS would be collected. The external UConn coaches would work with the district on interpreting data and deciding interventions with the teams.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said observers would look for fidelity in the implementation of the program and it would not include formal evaluation of teachers.

Mr. Sokolovic said the provisions on FERPA seemed to imply UConn could use the data any way that they so chose

as long as it's not illegal. Mr. Testani said he believed UConn would publish data to demonstrate the success of the program, if it is successful, in order to expand it. He said student data would be de-identified by district data management.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said the coaching would be done by HILL for Literacy and consultants, including adjunct professors from UConn. She said UConn has some of the leading authorities on positive behavior supports in the country.

Ms. Allen moved *"to enter into the memorandum of agreement with UConn for an integrated multi-tiered system of supports project in Grades K-2 reading and behavior supports."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action concerning a memorandum of agreement(MOU) with Today's Students, Tomorrow's Teachers.

Ms. Allen asked that a physical packet be delivered to her going forward.

Mr. Testani said there was a partnership at a significant cost to the district for many years prior to it being removed from the budget. He said the organization secured funding from private donors to restart the program to work with high school students who are identified and worked with during their college career, with the intent of returning to Bridgeport to teach. He said there would be no cost to the district at all for this MOU.

Ms. Allen moved “*to enter into the agreement.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the Today’s Students, Tomorrow’s Teachers personnel would be subject to the same background checks as other organizations that work with students.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action concerning award of a refuse removal contract. Tony Pires, business manager, presented on this item.

Mr. Pires said the item was a recommendation of the award to Country Disposal. He said an RFP was issued in February. He said a contract delivered by the city attorney’s office was created for the board’s approval.

Mr. Pires said Country Disposal was the only bidder that responded to the RFP. He said they have been the district’s provider for the past three years. He said he was extremely happy with their service and recommended approval.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said most of the refuse in the schools are not recyclable materials. He said the vendor is governed by state statutes in regards to recyclables. He said only cardboard and paper is recycled at the school level. Mr. Weldon noted that items that are contaminated with food or other matter are not recyclable.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said the last RFP for this service resulted in bids with considerably higher prices. He said he believed most companies were looking for a larger

profit margin than the district's vendor. He said the \$321,000 bid is the same as last year.

Mr. Lombard moved *"to award a contract for refuse removal with Country Disposal Services for the next three fiscal years."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action to issue an RFP for point of sale, inventory and production software for the nutrition center.

John Gerrity, director of food and nutrition services, said the current company is not supporting its software.

Mr. Weldon said once responses are received the board can talk about the merits of different providers.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said the purchase would be funded under the nutrition center's operating budget.

Ms. Brown moved *"to authorize the nutrition center to issue an RFP for point of sale, inventory, and production software for Bridgeport Public Schools' food and nutrition center."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action to solicit bids for commodity food items for the 2020-21 school year.

Mr. Gerrity said the department receives funding from the federal government through the state based on previous year's meal counts. U.S. Department of Agriculture raw food

products are purchased with the money and the products are sent to a processor for finishing. He said the department was looking to go out to bid with the food processors who provide the finished product.

Ms. Allen moved “*to authorize the nutrition center to solicit bids for USDA commodity food items for the 2020-21 school year.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion and possible action to accept devices from the Partnership for Connecticut for district high school students.

Mr. Testani said the partnership has purchased 60,000 laptop devices for high school students in the 33 Alliance districts in the state. He said it was not expected that any of the devices will arrive any earlier than the second week of May, and distribution procedures would add additional delay. He said they would be accepted as district property.

Mr. Testani said they are Dell laptops that Mr. Postolowski, the IT director, described as very good machines. They will include GPS tracking and content filtering. He said this will allow high school students to access curriculum online. He requested the board vote to accept the devices.

Ms. Allen moved “*to accept technology devices from the Partnership for Connecticut to be used by Bridgeport Public School high school students.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said almost five thousand devices would be received based on October 1 enrollment. He said the plan would be to distribute them

next year in lieu of textbooks, with classroom textbooks kept available. He said he has discussed protocols for distribution with Mr. Postolowski. He said a nominal fee would be assessed to families to insure or self-insure the devices.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said there would not be built-in WiFi in the devices. He said it is expected that the devices have enough capability to contain entire textbooks.

Mr. Testani said he would thank the Partnerships for Connecticut on behalf of the board. He said this is an opportunity for all students to have access to a good computer for years to come.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the laptops would only be provided to Alliance districts, not private, charter or parochial schools.

The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Weldon announced the board's committee assignments effective today.

The Facilities Committee will be chaired by Mr. Illingworth with members Benejan and Allen. Staff liaisons are Robert Hammond and Alan Wallack.

The Finance Committee will be chaired by Mr. Sokolovic with members Brown and Lombard. Staff liaison is Marlene Siegel.

The Governance Committee is chaired by Mr. Illingworth with members Martinez and Weldon. Staff liaison is Supt. Testani.

The Great City Schools/Males of Color Ad Hoc Committee is chaired by Mr. Sokolovic. Staff liaison is Dr. Melissa Jenkins.

The Personnel Committee is chaired by John Weldon with members Illingworth and Sokolovic. The staff liaison is Denise Altero-Dixon.

The Students and Families Committee is chaired by Mr. Albert Benejan with members Brown and Sokolovic. The staff liaison is Herminio Planas.

The Teaching and Learning Committee is chaired by Joseph Sokolovic with members Lombard and Allen. The staff liaison is Supt. Testani.

The Contracts Committee is chaired by John Weldon with members Lombard and Sokolovic. The staff liaison is Tony Pires.

Charter school governance council board liaisons:
Achievement First/Bridgeport Academy (Mr. Benejan)
Bridge Academy(Dr. Victor Black); Capital Prep Harbor School(Ms. Martinez); Great Oaks Charter School(Dr. Selena Morgan); New Beginnings Family Academy(Dr. Melissa Jenkins); Park City Prep(Ana Souza-Martins).

Board representatives to the City School Building Committee are Mr. Weldon and Mr. Sokolovic. The CES representative is Ms. Martinez.

The next agenda item was a COVID-19 update.

Mr. Testani said the governor has closed schools through May 20th. He said there has been outreach from parents

indicating that even a few weeks of the school at the end of the year would be valuable.

Mr. Testani said meals are being served at twenty locations between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., including during this spring break week.

Mr. Testani said the third marking period ended last week and student work is being accepted through April 20th. He said regular letter grades are being used. He said grading for the fourth marking period is still to be decided.

Mr. Testani said the district is in Phase 2 of its distance learning plan. Phase 3 will incorporate each teacher working individually with students and classes. He said printed materials are available to be picked up.

Mr. Testani said buildings have been cleaned. If school is closed through the end of the school year at some point summer cleaning will begin earlier than usual.

Mr. Testani said it is hoped to bring staff back to schools for professional development and planning for next year. He said it is also hoped that funding will be made available for students to get remediation and enrichment after school and on Saturdays in the next school year.

Mr. Testani said he spoke to Hartford's superintendent last week and the plan is to create a coalition among other large city superintendents to try to secure extra funds.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he was anticipating school closure for the remainder of the year but he was hopeful that could change and students could be brought back. He said he has spoken to Ms. Papa of the

Lighthouse Program about possible programming in the summer such as outdoor camps.

Mr. Testani said given the nature of the pandemic he has given consideration on how to hold graduations for students at some point. He said it could include students socially distanced without family and friends present. He said there was the possibility of holding something in June or July.

Mr. Benejan thanked Mr. Testani for the amazing job he was doing. Mr. Lombard said Mr. Testani was doing a great job.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the district had distributed over a thousand devices to parents who have requested them. However, he said, many parents prefer printed materials. He said parents who need a device should be directed to his office.

Mr. Weldon said he believed Mr. Testani and the staff was doing a great job under very trying circumstances. He thanked staff members who have helped make the remote board meetings work without a hitch.

Mr. Weldon said it was planned to hold the Regular Meeting on April 27th even if there are no actionable items. He said he would try to include a public comment component.

Ms. Allen said Mr. Testani was doing a wonderful job. Mr. Testani said during times of crisis the community comes together to support each other. He said he was proud of the way everyone had stepped up.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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