

Thursday, July 25, 2019

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held July
25, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace,
Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. Present were Chair John Weldon, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Hernan Illingworth, Maria Pereira, and Sybil Allen. LaMar Kennedy arrived subsequently as noted.

The first agenda item was the negotiation of an agreement with Beachside of Connecticut Soccer Club, Incorporated, for the use of the facilities at Harding High School.

Mr. Illingworth said the matter should be handled by the Facilities Committee. He moved that "*the matter be referred to the Facilities meeting in August.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Illingworth asked if the representatives of Beachside wanted to be heard. Mickey Kydes and Paul Melitsanopoulos were present.

Mr. Melitsanopoulos said the group was looking to establish a partnership with Bridgeport and Harding High School.

Following discussion, Mr. Weldon said the filing with the Secretary of State for the organization was Beachside of Connecticut SC, Inc.

Ms. Pereira noted there was a controversy at the University of Bridgeport regarding girls soccer and Beachside. She said although the organization was nonprofit, it had seven staff members listed online. She said the board seemed to be made up on all white males. Mr. Kydes said that was not true. Ms. Pereira said it seemed families from more affluent areas were served, noting prices of around \$3,000, which the average Bridgeport family would not be able to afford.

Mr. Kennedy arrived at the meeting.

Mr. Melitsanopoulos said we don't advertise it, but we provide financial assistance to any player or family that is interested or capable of playing in the club. He noted it was a competitive-based club with different levels. He said in 26 years they had never turned down a family for not being able to afford the tuition rates.

Ms. Pereira noted since she was Portuguese she was all about soccer. She expressed concern about the

maintenance costs and the wear and tear on the new field at Harding.

Mr. Kydes said the program included kids from Bridgeport and Norwalk, and had provided over \$300,000 in financial aid. Ms. Pereira said she would like to see a breakdown of the communities the program's players come from.

Mr. Kydes said they had many facility relationships. He said one benefit from a relationship is the field getting a free resurface of the turf in ten years.

Mr. Kydes said the hours requested in the initial documents represented more than what will be the eventual usage of the field. He said he worked with high schools all the time and the schools have priority for field usage.

Mr. Melitsanopoulos said four players from Bridgeport in his program recently received scholarships for college. Mr. Kydes said there had been a fifty percent increase in Bridgeport participants since moving to Bridgeport.

There was a discussion of when to hold a further meeting. Mr. Weldon suggesting working through Mr. Testani with a range of dates.

Mr. Kydes said he did not want to pressure the board and wanted to be realistic. He said if more time was needed starting next year would be fine.

Mr. Melitsanopoulos said the scheduling of 6:00 to 9:00 during the week is from decades of experience of understanding high school schedules. He said the company had relationships with New Canaan, Trinity Catholic and other schools.

Mr. Kydes said if it is not possible to complete things in time for this fall he appreciated the opportunity to get to know the board and for the board to know Beachside for the future. Mr. Melitsanopoulos said due to past experience Beachside knows much lights costs, how to keep schools clean, how to impact communities, and how to work with high school athletics.

Sal Hanaif, soccer coach at Bassick, said he knew the gentlemen. He said due to the limited resources at Bassick, including the lack of a field, he had received donations of equipment from them, assistance with placing players in college, and offers of free clinics.

Mr. Hanaif said a reason for the success of the team is support from the community and people like Beachside.

Mr. Kydes said Beachside was a nationally recognized program and had put kids in the World

Cup, but he was most proud of a 90 percent college placement rate in Bridgeport.

The next agenda items were school construction project approvals. Wilbur Cross, Discovery, Roosevelt and Claytor(Longfellow).

Present were Alan Wallack and Ken Flatto, finance director for the City of Bridgeport.

Mr. Wallack said the approvals by the board of the building projects starts the process so that the city can get reimbursement from the state for the percentage they put into the projects. He said Roosevelt, Claytor and Discovery were new schools; Cross was a renovate-as-new in 2012. He said part of the reason for the delay was turnover at the state level and the moving of the state's offices.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said there were no outstanding construction issues at the schools. He said the next step is filing for an audit, providing of the minutes of this meeting, and the final construction requisitions are submitted to the state. The state walks through the site and within three months the superintendent receives a report from the state regarding eligible costs.

Mr. Illingworth asked in the future the matters be brought first to the Facilities Committee. Mr. Flatto said he wished we had been here earlier. He said the

School Building Committee had pledged to take care of any issue with a facility that might come up. He said even with approval tonight, it would be a year before the city would receive the funds.

Mr. Flatto said there were two other projects that had change-order or contract issues that are not being presented tonight.

Ms. Pereira said this was an issue with O & G and it was not Mr. Wallack's fault.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to authorize the chair of the board and/or the acting superintendent of the Bridgeport Public Schools to sign any form of the acceptance by the Bridgeport Board of Education as complete state project number 015-01165 A/EC, Wilbur Cross Elementary School."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to authorize the chair of the Bridgeport Board of Education and/or the acting superintendent to accept by the Bridgeport Board of Education as complete state project number 015-0160 M, Discovery Magnet School."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

Mr. Illingworth moved *"to authorize the chair on behalf of the Bridgeport Board of Education and/or the acting superintendent to sign any necessary forms for the*

acceptance by the Bridgeport Board of Education as a complete state project number 015-0166, new Roosevelt School.” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

Mr. Illingworth moved “*on behalf of the Bridgeport Board of Education to have the chair of the Board of Education and/or the acting superintendent of Bridgeport Public Schools to sign on behalf of the Bridgeport Board of Education any necessary forms for the acceptance by Bridgeport Board of Education as a complete state project number 015-0167 N, new Longfellow School.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Pereira and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was the approval of the employment agreement with Michael J. Testani for the position of acting superintendent.

Ms. Allen moved to go into executive session. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth.

Mr. Weldon said the purpose of the executive session was to discuss the employment agreement with Michael J. Testani for the position of acting superintendent.

The motion was approved by a 4-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Allen, Weldon and Kennedy. Voting in opposition were members Sokolovic and Pereira.

Ms. Pereira suggested the board vote to go into executive session for all remaining items on the agenda.

Ms. Allen moved *“to go into executive session to discuss Items 6, 7 and 8, and those items being employment with Michael J. Testani for the position of acting superintendent, the MOU with BCAS concerning Michael J. Testani, and the MOU with BCAS regarding Victor Black, Melissa Jenkins, Selena Morgan and Herminio Planas.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth.

The motion was approved by a 4-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Allen, Weldon and Kennedy. Voting in opposition were members Sokolovic and Pereira.

The executive session began at 7:09 p.m.

The board reconvened in public session at 8:12 p.m.

Mr. Illingworth moved *“to approve the employment agreement with Michael J. Testani for the position of acting superintendent with the modifications as noted in executive session.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen.

Ms. Pereira said she was firm in her position that Mr. Testani is not qualified to be the superintendent of the

largest district in the state and the salary of \$200,000 in no way is appropriate based on his not having an 093, a doctorate and never being a principal, never mind an assistant superintendent or previous superintendent experience.

Mr. Sokolovic said he would be voting no, but not disparaging qualifications. He said the board needs to do better at negotiating and could have been firm for a lower salary.

The motion was approved by a 4-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Allen, Weldon and Kennedy. Voting in opposition were members Sokolovic and Pereira.

Ms. Allen moved *"to approve the MOU with BCAS concerning Michael J. Testani with the modifications as noted in executive session."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Kennedy.

Ms. Pereira said she objected to the language that Mr. Testani will return to his permanent assignment because no position in the district is permanent.

The motion was approved by a 5-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Allen, Kennedy, Sokolovic and Weldon. Ms. Pereira was opposed.

Mr. Kennedy moved *"to approve the MOU with BCAS regarding Victor Black, Melissa Jenkins, Selena*

Morgan and Herminio Planas with the modifications as noted in executive session.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Allen.

Ms. Weldon said the modification was to designate them as acting.

Mr. Sokolovic said, although it seemed like this was saving a lot of money, he had a lot of concerns about academics going forward due to the assignments being given to the directors. He said he believed things like the STEM field is going to be rudderless, particularly with the new science curriculum, new math textbooks and new literacy texts.

Ms. Pereira said she objected because it set a poor tone for our certified staff because the executive director positions are really assistant superintendents without being posted or it did not allow for other applicants. She said she had no issue with the individuals themselves, but with the process. She said she was concerned that under the BCAS contract the first person in the grievance process is the assistant superintendent.

Ms. Pereira said board members voted to eliminate two assistant superintendents under Dr. Johnson, leaving her with two in the largest district in the state; yet Mr. Testani, who is a white male, is going to have four executive directors, which are equivalent to assistant superintendents. She said the process,

including the promotion of the BCAS president, looks bad and inappropriate.

Mr. Illingworth said he doesn't want the community to get the wrong idea that we're eliminating the whole math and literacy department. He said the directors were taking on additional responsibilities and a committee of specialized teachers will be added that will assist in day-to-day decisions in curriculum and other matters.

The motion was approved by a 4-2 vote. Voting in favor were members Illingworth, Allen, Weldon and Kennedy. Voting in opposition were members Sokolovic and Pereira.

Ms. Pereira said she did not take issue with Victor Black, Selena Morgan, Herminio Planas or Melissa Jenkins. She said it just looks like favoritism.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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