

Monday, May 16, 2022

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May 16, 2022, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. Present were members Chair Christine Baptiste-Perez, Joseph Sokolovic, and Joe Lombard. Board member Albert Benejan* joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

(*Remote participation.)

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of May 5, 2022. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and approved by a 2-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Baptiste-Perez and Sokolovic. Mr. Lombard abstained.

Mr. Sokolovic motioned to amend the agenda item on the Tango Flight item up to number two on the agenda and the other items following it immediately. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously.

Mr. Benejan joined the meeting.

The next agenda item was an update on Bassick High's Tango Flight project.

Dr. Joseph Raiola, principal of Bassick High, was present. Also present were, Aaron Hollander, a board member of Tango Flight, who said he had thirty years of experience in aviation. David Paqua, a resident of Norwalk, said he

restores antique aircraft, and has enjoyed working with the students at Bassick High.

Supt. Testani said Dr. Cardona, when he was the Commissioner of Education, presented this opportunity to Bridgeport. He said it was a nice fit for Bassick due to the auto shop program there. The project is to build a two-person aircraft, which will be sold at the end of the project, with the proceeds funding another aircraft to be built at Bassick.

Dr. Raiola thanked the superintendent for bringing the project to Bassick, which has improved the overall climate within the auto shop. He said a large group of mentors work hands-on with the students. Students receive first-hand experience in aviation.

Photos were displayed of the project. Dr. Raiola said the students get technical reading and drawing skills. It is hoped the plane will fly next year.

Dr. Raiola said students are being recruited to participate in a summer program this summer at Sikorsky Airport, which will expose them to careers in the aviation field. He noted the hard work of teacher Steve Blum on the project.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had full faith in our students and would be happy to fly on anything they build. Mr. Paqua said most of the fall semester would be needed to finalize the plane. Mr. Hollander said progress was similar to building a house and he noted the difficulty in obtaining the avionics for the inside of the aircraft due to supply chain issues. He thanked Dr. Raiola for his support and visiting the project, along with Mr. Blum. He said the volunteers include engineers who work at Sikorsky and aviation enthusiasts.

In response to a question, Dr. Raiola said the career counselor at the school has done presentations on career pathways around aviation. The mentors have also engaged in informal discussions with students about future opportunities.

Mr. Hollander said there have been field trips to Sikorsky Airport, which exposed students to potential employment opportunities. He said some students are looking at engineering or military opportunities.

Mr. Paqua said the education side was new to him, and he observed students making progress in learning how to use tools. He said there is a lot of teamwork involved for the students.

Supt. Testani said last summer there was a partnership with Ansonia schools to send staff members from Bassick to a three-day externship at Sikorsky to learn about career opportunities that can be shared with students. He described a visit to the modern manufacturing setup at Sikorsky that exists now.

Mr. Benejan said he saw the amazing project at the school and the work of Mr. Blum. He asked that Mr. Blum be involved in a presentation. The superintendent noted that Mr. Blum is not one to get in front of the camera and take any credit.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she looked forward to having a future meeting at Bassick High to see the project firsthand.

The next agenda item was on a Central High School field trip to Nashville, Tennessee.

Carmen Marietta-Francisco, chair of the English department and the advisor for HOSA (Health Occupation Students of America) was present. She said the students have raised money this year to go to the International Leadership Conference.

Ms. Marietta-Francisco said the three young ladies have participated in medical discussion panels from Yale-New Haven and engaged in community service projects. She said the students will get the opportunity to interact with representatives regarding scholarships and college opportunities. One student has already trained to be an EMT. Colleges, career, and military opportunities can also be investigated.

Mr. Sokolovic said this was probably the smallest field trip that has come before the board. Ms. Marietta-Francisco said it was open to all 33 members of the chapter, but many could not go due to finances or obligations at home. She said some parents had concerns about Covid. She said the cost of the room is \$1300, which the three girls will share; inexpensive flights were found through Avelo. The three students were the ones who put forth the effort to do fundraising.

In response to a question, Ms. Marietta-Francisco said the students will share with the chapter what they have learned. She described the connections that have been made from past conventions and networking successes.

In response to a question, Ms. Marietta-Francisco said one student who was unable to pay was assisted by finding sponsors in the school and at Fairfield University. She said

Ms. Smith, the magnet director at the school, brought HOSA to the state and has been a big cheerleader for the program.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she'd like to have a presentation on HOSA in the future. Ms. Marietta-Francisco said there are five male members of the chapter, but they were unable to go on the trip.

Mr. Lombard moved *"to present to the full board approval for Central High's field trip to Nashville, Tennessee."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the Discovery Education science contract.

David Henry, director of science and Aquaculture School, was present.

Supt. Testani said this is a huge undertaking. He said with the availability of funds through ARP/ESSER there will be support to Mr. Henry through a coordinator of K-8 science, who could be absorbed as an assistant principal through attrition, if needed, when funding runs out. He said this is to ensure science is taught at all grade levels and is not just being touched on in the early grades.

Mr. Henry said the goal is to align NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) with the science education in the district. He said a K-12 program to support that was sought. He said a science leadership team was formed of teachers and an assistant principal, and four companies were chosen to receive give presentations during the first semester of this school year.

Mr. Henry said all science teachers in the district received presentations remotely through Teams. Teachers responded to a survey, which included ratings on effectiveness with ELL students and special needs learners, online and digital resources, user friendliness, the relation to everyday life for students, the NGSS alignment, and the quality of learning progression.

Mr. Henry said the Discovery product won ten categories of ratings and the next closest company won less than half of that. He said this made them a clear standout from the pack, with extensive digital resources available for teachers and students. He said the product can easily be synched with Power School and Class Link. He said access would begin with high school next year, including an online textbook with the ability to print.

Mr. Henry said K to 5 would use HMH for one more year. Starting with the 2023-24 school year they will start using Discovery Education. He said the K-5 students will have access to the Mystery Science, which is an effective tool, along with all the other students in the district.

Mr. Henry said Grades 6 to 8 will use iQuest for next two years. Mystery Science will be available to those students, and the Discovery Education product would be used beginning in the 2024-25 school year.

Mr. Henry said there are paper workbooks in addition to the digital books. He described several other features, including ELL supports and different levels of English reading.

Mr. Henry said there are flexible professional development hours available to staff.

Mr. Henry said Discovery Education is used all over the country, and in Danbury, Stamford, Greenwich, and Meriden schools.

Mr. Henry said the cost is slightly below \$2.7 million. He said Ms. Siegel, the CFO, was involved in the negotiations.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said the products were rated in seven different categories and three different grade bands. He said Discovery won all the grade levels.

Supt. Testani said if we went with multiple products, it would not be possible to negotiate the best deal possible. He said a product was sought that teachers are going to utilize in the classroom and not shy away from, especially at the lower grades.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said there are kits for Grades 3 and 5, with refills every year. He said the kits are aligned with the units being studied. Mr. Sokolovic asked that some examples be shared with the full board.

Mr. Benejan thanked Mr. Henry for an amazing presentation.

Supt. Testani said the cost is about \$337,000 per year for the eight years, which is slightly less than that for the three grade bands of mathematics over six years. Mr. Sokolovic said an investment in science is worth it.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry clarified provisions of the contract regarding start dates of access. He noted some off ramps in Exhibit E to the contract in case things go awry that were negotiated by Ms. Siegel. Supt. Testani said this was inserted per his request because of experience with a previous vendor.

In response to a question, Mr. Henry said the professional development can be in person or virtual.

Mr. Sokolovic moved “*to move the Discovery Education science contract to the full board for approval.*” The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a special education update.

Lauren Lucas and Bridget Corcoran, special education supervisors, were present. Supt. Testani said they had been doing a great job in helping with leadership within the department in the absence of a director.

Ms. Corcoran said planning for extended school year services has been ongoing. The program will run from July 5 to July 27. There has also been work on transition planning, which begins for special education at the pre-K level. She said we are obligated by the state to ensure that specialized education transition planning is in place by a student’s 14th birthday. She said there was professional development to accomplish this, and we are working with the state on our compliance.

Ms. Corcoran said we anticipate starting the next school year fully staffed in the office of specialized instruction. There has been a high rate of vacancy in positions during the course of the year. She said the district is in partnership with CREC, and nine current teachers in the district have made the decision to cross-endorse and go through training to become special educators in the fall.

Ms. Lucas described the training process on the new IEP system, which continues until June 16th, with trainers from

the state training different cohorts. Cohort training also took place with administrators. She said she trained all principals on IEP hotspots, which are key areas to keep the IEPs in compliance.

Supt. Testani described the training provided to principals. He said the building leaders are the conduit between the teaching staff and the special education department and the supervisors.

Ms. Lucas said the department is also working with Ms. Siegel on the ESSER grant to bring in resources and training for teachers for the next school year.

Ms. Corcoran said a question was asked about schools with high special education populations. She said this was an opportunity to dive into the data.

Ms. Corcoran said 2,010 students are pending eligibility after an initial referral to special education. This year, 547 students have been determined to be ineligible. There are 798 referrals currently pending and eligible. The total of all referrals this year is 1,449. She also described the historical data over the last four years.

Ms. Corcoran said as a district we are referring 1 student of every 34, which includes charter students and out-of-district placement students.

Ms. Corcoran said the data was broken down by each school as requested by the board. She said if a school has a higher rate of referrals or IEPs it flags to the department that we need to engage the administration in a conversation. She said it does not mean that something is wrong, but it directs conversations.

Ms. Corcoran the schools with the lowest rates of IEPs are between five and twelve percent, with the highest between twenty-five and thirty percent of their population. The superintendent said some of that can be from housing programs over the years in schools where there was space. He said there is a greater effort now to keep special education students in their neighborhood schools.

In response to a question, Ms. Corcoran said the kindergarten percentages are relatively high and reassessments occur when children are six years old.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said some of the reduction in numbers in 11th and 12th grade is due to students dropping out. Ms. Corcoran said at age 18 if a young person is their own guardian, they can elect not to have specialized instruction.

Mr. Sokolovic said males outnumber females in special education services; he said when he sees disparities like this his first thought is a possible bias. Supt. Testani said a lot of times there is not enough data to support going to PPT and it is often done because of behaviors that are exhibited. He said the professional development is directed towards addressing this.

Ms. Corcoran said there are many reasons why subgroups are labeled. She said antibias training is crucial. She said we are looking at over-identification by gender, race, ethnicity, and age.

In response to a question, Ms. Lucas said there are modules online for parents to access the new procedures.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said 25 teachers in the district applied for the CREC fellowship. The applicants were vetted through HR, and it was narrowed down to 19 offers. The six teachers who were not chosen were told they may have another opportunity down the line. Ms. Corcoran said some teachers asked to remain in their current buildings and others asked for different buildings. The superintendent said the teachers could not come other shortage areas, such as mathematics. He said the teachers had to commit to staying in special education for three years through an MOU with the BEA.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the district is reviewing three proposals for a special education audit. Two bids are close in price, but one has familiarity with Connecticut and a similar-sized district. When finalized, the matter will be brought to the board.

In response to a question, Ms. Corcoran said three matters that came to us were resolved with corrective action before they went to complaints. Supt. Testani being open and honest and requesting support has been extremely well received at the state level.

Mr. Benejan noted some parents have difficulties with technology or language. Ms. Corcoran said that is an area of concern and is one of the reasons that drove the initiative with the SPED PAC, the advisory group for families. It is hoped to use approaches such welcome centers or community events to reach all families.

In response to a question, Ms. Corcoran said the percentage was developed by comparing referrals to enrollment.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she really appreciated the great amount of data that was provided.

The next agenda item was on Footsteps 2 Brilliance. Terese Maguire the director of early childhood education, was present.

Ms. Maguire said the goal was to become a model city intervention. The program began on December 8th with preschool students. About 10,000 hours have been spent on literacy with pre-K students. She said pre-K teachers participated in professional development to work with the three apps available with Footsteps 2 Brilliance, which is one of the first apps we've seen that comes in English and Spanish. Another important feature is that it is not wi-fi dependent, and material can be downloaded from school wi-fi.

Ms. Maguire said letters were sent to families to launch access, which included unique codes. She said further training for teachers demonstrated data on proficiency and growth. She said the data allows teachers to further boost skills needed by students.

Ms. Maguire said she observed students being excited about using the app, including the ability to write their own books. She said there was good feedback from families about the app being available at home.

Ms. Maguire said the final training for pre-K teachers was called virtual office hours, which included discussion of how to more effectively use the data.

Ms. Maguire said the app will provided for pre-K to 3rd grade during the summer. Families will be given information on

how to access the app. There will be a challenge to encourage use with small prizes. The early reading teachers in the summer program will be trained on the use of the app.

Ms. Maguire said she worked to ensure equity between BOE and community sites. Families at the community pre-K sites can also download the app.

Supt. Testani said, as he indicated last summer, he believed this may be one of the most significant initiatives that will have impact on the growth and development of students long-term. He said the access to literature and literacy prior to entering kindergarten will have a big payoff.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the program was funded by the ESSER grant.

In response to a question, Ms. Maguire said the app tracks the interaction with words.

Mr. Lombard said he was happy to see the rollout going so well. Supt. Testani said it was important to roll it out slowly so as not to overwhelm teachers.

Ms. Maguire described an incident with a student excelling with the use of the app.

The superintendent said the focus on early childhood education opens the door for exploring and learning other content. He said he believed the team believed we need to stay committed and consistent to the initiative.

The next agenda item was a report on the work done by Partners for Educational Leadership with administrators in the district in 2021-22.

Supt. Testani said from having attended a lot of meetings and professional development he believed the administration was starving for high-quality professional development to improve leadership, especially instructional leadership. He noted there had been a large influx of new assistant principals in the district as well.

The superintendent said Partners for Educational Leadership was approached and he decided to engage in a partnership for support to the central office and principals.

Dr. Melissa Jenkins, chief academic officer, said the work began in June 2021, with the superintendent and the cabinet. Four areas of strategy revolved around making sure students had high-quality task or assignments; making sure teachers feel supported with assessment in the classroom; supports for social-emotional learning coming out of the pandemic; and making sure supports for teachers are provided for Tier I instruction.

Dr. Jenkins said the most important relationship is that between the teacher, the student, and the content.

Dr. Jenkins said in August 2021 all school leaders, from the superintendent to the school administrators, spent two days learning what high-quality tasks look like.

Dr. Jenkins said in September and October classrooms were visited and it was learned that not all students had access to high-quality assignments. She said about fifty percent were on point. The information was brought back to school leaders, who then began to work with teachers.

Dr. Jenkins said principals engage in data collection in what are called empathy interviews with teachers, where high-quality assignments are discussed. Small changes are being considered to increase high-quality assignments.

Dr. Jenkins said the work has allowed the development of a shared understanding of the work. She said she believed we are more united than at any time in her sixteen years in the district.

Dr. Jenkins said the number of teacher leaders, who provide instructional support to principals, are being expanded. She said twelve new principals and nineteen new assistant principals have received monthly professional development.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said every school has teacher leaders and they do not do administrative work.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins described the professional development provided to principals and assistant principals.

Dr. Jenkins said, along with Dr. Morgan and Mr. Planas, we have partnered with some other districts to learn how they have benefited from working with Partners for Educational Leadership.

Mr. Lombard said it is obvious that everyone needs support and guidance, so this is an important investment. The superintendent said that in the course of a day the administration can be distracted very easily from focusing on teaching and learning. He said it is emphasized to principals the need to get into classrooms to provide feedback to teachers.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said the directors' visits to classrooms led to emphasizing that the use of curriculum such as Reading Wonders is not an option, but they are things that must be used. She described how earth science instruction was addressed and the importance of using the time allocated to instruction. She said teachers and principals have been trained in ten instructional routines. She described a strategy used to pair students up as reading buddies.

Supt. Testani said the principal cohorts become a safe space to share and to support each other.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said when it is learned that a program is not being used appropriately, an intervention is put in place for the teacher. The curriculum is reviewed with the teacher. She said the principals have received a tremendous amount of professional development from the directors and the partners on which programs are core and which are supplementary. She said the supplementary programs can be leveraged at home, but the core is delivered by the classroom teacher.

Supt. Testani said one supplemental program wasn't effective and was being overused, and it was abandoned. The use of the supplemental took away from the core curriculum.

Mr. Lombard said he could imagine teachers using lesson plans developed long ago prior to the introduction of new books and curriculum.

Dr. Jenkins said last Wednesday was the first time in a long time that teachers in grades four to six, along with the

administrators, had received professional development in social studies.

Supt. Testani said there was training before the pandemic on the effectiveness of mini observations of teachers. He said it can be done in increments of fifteen minutes.

Supt. Testani said the work will continue with the partners through the next two school years via funding through ESSER and ARP. He said the teacher leaders are a critical component and are relatively inexpensive at about \$1 million. He said the teacher leaders will be important in retention and supporting new teachers in their first few years of teaching.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

Draft