

Wednesday, May 6, 2020

MINUTES OF THE TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEE
OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held May
6, 2020, by video and audio conference call, Bridgeport,
Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. Present were members Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, and Joseph Lombard. Board member Albert Benejan was present.

Acting Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present

Ms. Allen moved to approve the minutes of February 25, 2020. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to *“move up the math curriculum agenda in place of the next item.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

Herminio Planas, executive director of elementary education, presented on the item. He said a committee met from October 2019 to February 2020, and consisted of teachers, including bilingual and special ed, and Grade K-8 administrators. A rubric was developed to evaluate the curriculum options. Thirty to forty vendors were looked at and then narrowed down to four finalists.

Mr. Planas said the current curriculum, Math in Focus, has a 2013 copyright date. He said current books in the market are more aligned with Common Core. He added the physical books are almost ten years old and needed to be replaced due to wear and tear.

Mr. Planas said the product chosen – Into Math - includes a six-year license that will include revisions to books for the life of the license.

Mr. Planas said all teachers in Grades 6-8 were provided licenses to use the books of the two finalists. He said *Into Math* received almost double marks as the other finalist in scaffolding instruction, and a similar positive score in practice for students.

Mr. Planas said the total costs of both finalists were only about \$5,000 apart. The cost for Into Math will be \$794,846. He said the student books will be replenished each year and student and teacher digital licenses will be provided. Also included is \$40,000 for professional development in the first three years and the ability of teachers to send lessons from the book or the program on different topics to students, which is valuable for SRBI.

Mr. Sokolovic said the importance of textbook replenishment seemed not to be understood by an educator on the City Council. He said our students deserve the same access and technology that students in other towns receive.

In response to a question, Mr. Planas said the purchase includes all consumables for six years and gives the children the ability to write in the books. Mr. Testani said this means teachers won't need to make photocopies of materials.

Mr. Planas said the program allows instruction up to two grade levels down for free, which will assist SRBI.

Mr. Lombard moved *"to move this to the full board for approval."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item on the literacy assessment for Grades K to 3 was presented by Dr. Melissa Jenkins and is proposed to be used in the upcoming school year.

Dr. Jenkins said the literacy skills addressed are phonemic awareness, a foundational skill in reading; letter naming fluency; phonics; reading fluency; and reading comprehension. She said benchmark screening would occur at the beginning, middle and end of the school year.

Dr. Jenkins said the test is administered on paper in a one-on-one fashion. It takes fifteen to twenty minutes to enter the assessment into a database.

Dr. Jenkins said it was a cost-effective method for dyslexia screening; effective at monitoring reading growth across the year; and provides instructionally relevant data that the teacher can actually see, unlike some computerized assessments.

In response to a question, Dr. Jenkins said the assessment, DIBELS, was in use across the state, including in districts with large populations of students who receive services. She said DIBELS would replace iReady for Grades K to 3. The state provides the Smarter Balance assessment for free in Grades 3 to 8.

Mr. Testani said it was frustrating to see the amount of assessments and testing that takes place during the year. He said in the past the state questioned why the district was administering the SBAC test so early in the testing window,

and the response was because we had to leave time for the iReady spring assessment. He said this would simplify the assessment process and give more accurate data.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the cost is \$1 per student for the entire year. Dr. Jenkins said there would be professional development for teachers on the assessment.

Ms. Allen moved *“to push to the full board to adopt the DIBELS plan for Bridgeport Public Schools.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on grading for marking period four.

Mr. Testani said the topic was in discussion statewide and nationally. He said he had received input from teachers, administrators and, most importantly, students.

Mr. Testani said he did not want to shortchange students who have taken the distance learning seriously from the beginning with a simple pass/fail, while not giving undue stress to struggling students.

He said the proposal to bring forward is a pass/fail grade, with the possibility of a pass with distinction. He said the pass, pass with distinction, and fail will include a numerical grade in order to average with the first three marking periods. Failing will be graded at 55; passing 75; and pass with distinction 90. He said students who perform at higher than a 90 could have their final grade adjusted upward by their teacher.

Mr. Testani said there would be a culminating project or paper to complete for final exams. There would be no need to purchase supplies in order to complete the projects.

Mr. Testani said students would not be given a choice of grading standard for individual classes. He said a larger box on report cards for comments will be provided to teachers for elementary school students in pre-K to 5.

Mr. Testani said for high school students the goal was to reflect the work that a child was able to produce, but at the same time not to overly penalize students who struggled in the last marking period and keep them engaged in the education process.

Mr. Testani said the last day of school for students will be June 17th, with teachers having additional days.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said, once approved by the board, the final approach will be communicated to parents. He described the numerical scores to be used as giving every child the benefit of the doubt.

Mr. Lombard described the system as a hybrid form of grading. Mr. Testani said after getting input from teachers and administrators it brought home the stress felt by families and students. He added teachers shared students essays about stresses in homes that the students are under.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he believed there were some students and teachers doing very well in distance learning across the state, some doing okay, and some doing poorly. He said the district had to understand that there is going to be deficits by losing of 30 percent of the school year. He added there would be a virtual summer school on

the Teams platform for high school students. He said the students would not have to make the usual payments for summer school.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said for a high school students who gets a 55 in the fourth marking period and fails a course it most likely meant the three other quarters and the midterm were not very good either. He said if it's extremely close the benefit of the doubt will be given to the students, and summer school will be free. He said students with hardships will be given the opportunity for incomplete grades.

Mr. Sokolovic said he did not believe the magnet schools should deselect any students this year. Mr. Testani said he agreed and struggling students could be discussed in the narrative portion of the report card. Mr. Sokolovic suggested the board pass a motion suspending the deselection process.

Mr. Lombard moved *"to pick up Item 2, discussion and possible action on grading."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was an update on COVID. Mr. Testani noted public school classes have been cancelled through the end of the academic school year. He said there will be information on guidelines coming from the state on May 15th on summer camps and summer schools. He said his concerns include summer programs for special education students and early reading programs. He said he was also concerned if enough teachers were willing to engage in these programs in the buildings.

Mr.. Testani said he would work with Lighthouse for whatever outdoor camps can be provided. He said only bathrooms and the cafeteria could be used indoors and bad weather on a given day would mean cancelation.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he has been soliciting staff to participate in a reopening committee, which will include some community organizations and parents. He said a big question in reopening will be transportation and busing.

Mr. Lombard suggested permanent changes be looked at in regards to social distancing and deep cleaning. Mr. Testani said the cleanliness of buildings had always been a pet peeve due to some buildings being much cleaner than others. He said the current situation pointed up the need for technology in the classroom and to have teachers utilizing it effectively. He said there were opportunities to have virtual meetings with parents going forward.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said whether a lot of the ideas being discussed in the news about the future course of education is still not known.

Mr. Testani noted he would be doing a Facebook live event on Friday morning to provide information to clear up information going out from the city. He added that his heart goes out to parents that are at home with young learners and trying to get through some of this.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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