

Monday, October 28, 2019

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 28, 2019, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Jessica Martinez, Secretary Joseph Sokolovic, Sybil Allen, Hernan Illingworth, Chris Taylor, Maria Pereira, and Joseph Lombard.

Acting Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Marge Hiller said over 650 readers participated in Read Aloud Day in the district, with every single pre-K to 6th grade class having a reader. She said a book was left in every classroom. She said one purpose of the event is to recruit volunteers to read, tutor or mentor. She asked the board to make sure it is not the last Read Aloud Day.

Ed Davies, president of the School Volunteer Association, said this was his 21st year of volunteering in the district. He said he read at Batalla School along with nearly 40 volunteers. He said the school volunteer office positions needed to be restored to the budget this year.

Diana Planas, a coordinator for Parent Leadership Training

Institute(PLTI), said the program had been in the city for 22 years. She provided a booklet of stories from Bridgeport parents who have been helped by PLTI, which included Mr. Illingworth. The booklet is the result of a collaboration between NYU and the national PLTI board.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of October 15, 2019. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and approved by a 7-0 vote.

Voting in favor were members Weldon, Sokolovic, Martinez, Pereira, Allen, Illingworth and Lombard. Mr. Taylor abstained.

CHAIR REPORT

In response to a question, Mr. Weldon said a contract for the superintendent search firm has been submitted to the city attorney's office for legal review.

Mr. Taylor noted the passing of Anne Pappas Phillips, who was a champion of education. Mr. Weldon asked for a moment of silence for Ms. Phillips, a member of the city's zoning commission and a former candidate for City Council.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/AGENDA:

Ms. Pereira said she referred the issue of the contaminants on the Hubbell site to the Facilities Committee. She said there remained the issue of the fill delivered by Julian to Harding High. She said the fill was supposed to be the buffer between the contaminants and the school. She said eight sites in Fairfield were found to have been contaminated by

fill.

Mr. Testani said there was extensive testing done throughout the Harding project. He said Mr. Wallack gave him a copy of the results of the tests which indicates the fill at Harding is clean. He said from speaking to folks at the state level school construction projects undergo extreme testing and are subject to strict rules and regulations.

Ms. Allen said she believed the Julian company was out of business so the board would be unable to recoup any damages. Mr. Sokolovic noted the fill was used on playgrounds in Fairfield.

Mr. Illingworth said he had a conversation with Mr. Wallack, who indicated the fill did not come from Fairfield. He said Mr. Wallack was in the process of gathering the paperwork on the issue. Mr. Illingworth said he would add the item to the committee's agenda.

Mr. Taylor said he had firsthand knowledge that six thousand cubic yards was delivered from Julian in Fairfield. He said the company submitted fraudulent documents and bonds to Fairfield. He said he believed they could pull the wool over Mr. Wallack's eyes. He said what he and Ms. Pereira brought up about this was swept under the carpet by what Mr. Wallack said.

Mr. Taylor said he received a call from Robert Halstead about getting the run-around with the gardening program. He asked the Facilities Committee look at the issue. Mr. Illingworth suggested Mr. Taylor have Mr. Halstead contact him directly.

Mr. Weldon said Mr. Halstead was at the last meeting and

he met with Mr. Testani. Mr. Testani said he addressed Mr. Halstead's concerns. Mr. Halstead is attempting to recruit volunteers for the gardens.

Ms. Allen said she failed to see how Mr. Wallack was an expert for building schools. She urged the board get someone who was qualified, instead of going with the good old boy system. She said Mr. Wallack should be terminated.

Ms. Pereira said the matter should also be referred to the School Building Committee. Mr. Taylor said they're all on the take.

Ms. Allen said she believed Bassick would have the same problem.

Ms. Pereira said she fought against putting Harding on the GE site. She said suburban communities would never put their students on contaminated sites, so why would should Bridgeport do it.

Ms. Pereira said she had requested information on the Lighthouse Program being run at Central High. She added the matter needs to come before the board because it involves the use of a school building after school.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the lacrosse at Park City Magnet is part of the Lighthouse Program.

Ms. Martinez reported on the Finance Committee meeting. She said there was a budget update, review of contracts, and food services' requests for vehicles.

Ms. Allen suggested a motion to separate from Mr. Wallack. Mr. Weldon said the board could not do that because it is

against the law. Ms. Allen said Mr. Testani should take the action.

Mr. Sokolovic referred to the Finance Committee the financial impact of the contact with NAGE, which is negotiated by the city. Mr. Testani said the contract had to be voted on by the membership by November 6th.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Teaching & Learning Committee would meet on November 19th.

Ms. Pereira reiterated her referral on the program being developed by Sacred Heart for the district to grow its own teachers. Mr. Testani said he did not have a discussion about the \$2 million raised by the university referenced by Ms. Pereira.

Ms. Pereira referred the special education situation to the committee. She said the situation is starting to sound like what happened under Supt. Vallas. Mr. Sokolovic said special education would be an ongoing item on the committee's agenda.

Mr. Testani said some transportation costs were not approved, but options are being looked at to help a family. He said other issues are being addressed by Mr. Arnold. He said there was an episode in March when a child was placed on homebound instruction and should have been in an out-of-district placement to start the school year. He said the situation has been rectified.

Regarding Personnel Committee referrals, Ms. Pereira said she had been waiting a year and a half for teacher turnover data. Mr. Testani said he would present a three-year report by school at the next meeting.

Ms. Pereira said it was announced that an increase in a grant led to three assistant principals being reinstated. She said the board's minutes reflect it voted to eliminate the positions without reference to which schools so Mr. Testani cannot fill three positions the board voted to eliminate without a two-thirds vote of the board.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the district was down two assistant principals from last year. He said one was returned to Black Rock and the vacant position at Barnum/Waltersville is being filled.

Ms. Martinez said the matter should be referred to the Finance Committee.

Mr. Lombard asked if the superintendent could hire someone without coming to the board.

Mr. Taylor said he received a call from a Bridgeport security officer who is out on leave. In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he could look into the matter. Mr. Weldon said the officer brought the matter up at the last meeting.

Ms. Martinez said she believed the board prioritized the items to be brought back to the budget if funds became available. She said she would investigate the minutes and understand if the superintendent has the power to bring the position back at the next committee meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said the superintendent has the ability to bring back positions in the absence of a board vote, but the board voted to cut two assistant principal positions.

Ms. Pereira said the board usually sets up a list of priorities

to bring back, but did not do so for this year.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Students & Families Committee met on October 23rd and heard a report on PAC/PTSO membership and School Governance Council membership. There was also a discussion of District PAC bylaws, which will be presented at the next board meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee also discussed a partnership between the Harding CNA program and 3030 Watermark and Lord Chamberlain.

Mr. Sokolovic reported on the Great Cities Schools/Males of Color meeting of October 18th. Last year's forum, the mentorship programs, and the committee's direction were discussed. He said work on the white paper continues. He apologized for not forwarding the white paper outline to the board members.

Ms. Pereira said the ad hoc committee for two security policies has now existed for a little over a year and only one meeting has been held by Mr. Sokolovic. She said she would like to be removed from the committee.

Mr. Taylor said that Mr. Sokolovic does an amazing job in everything he does. He said he would not chastise Mr. Sokolovic. He said he would not acknowledge Ms. Pereira or her existence.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Mr. Testani said he had the privilege of reading to a first grade class on Read Aloud Day at Roosevelt School. He complimented the students and thanked Anne Gribbon for her hard work and dedication.

Mr. Testani said he has just concluded a first round of student roundtables at all the high schools. He thanked the students for their insight and their brutal honesty on what's happening in their schools. He said one parent roundtable was held at Harding that included about fifty parents from throughout the district.

Mr. Testani said he was working with PACs and PTSOs to make sure that all schools have elections held and officers in place.

Mr. Testani said he is working with the Bilingual/ESL office on a toolkit for teachers and a forum for parents on their programs. In response to a question, he said Make the Road is organizing the group of moms he met with.

Mr. Testani said chronic absenteeism is a major focus this year. All schools have submitted plans on how to combat absenteeism. He said the goal is to get the chronic absentee rate below 15 percent. In response to a question, he said some elementary schools had unacceptable levels of chronic absenteeism.

Mr. Testani said this month had a focus on anti-bullying. All schools submitted a plan on bullying.

Mr. Testani said the fifth professional development with administration surrounding the instructional core is being concluded.

Mr. Testani said the first of quarterly data meetings with principals was held today to address the growth index and iReady scores.

Mr. Testani commended Ron Rapice for the opening of the poetry garden at the University of Bridgeport. District students read poetry along with UB students.

Mr. Testani said many schools had festivities for Hispanic Heritage Month.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said schools are holding elections for student representatives to the board. Guidelines for what is expected of the student representatives have been created.

NEW BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was a trip to Nature's Classroom by Roosevelt School Students. Herminio Planas said the trip would include 25 students with 3 chaperones from November 12th to November 15th. He said a grant covered all the costs of the trip. Mr. Testani said after there were difficulties raising the money for the trip, PSE&G provided the funding.

Ms. Pereira described a business owner who was dismayed not to have received a thank-you note for his donation for a trip at another school.

Ms. Martinez moved "*to approve the field trip of Nature's Classroom for Roosevelt School.*" The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the issuing of an RFP for three vans for the nutrition department out of the nutrition budget.

John Gerrity, food and nutrition director, said he had provided the board with a timeline and a score sheet for

scoring the proposals as requested at the Finance Committee.

In response to a question, Mr. Gerrity said the requested passenger van transports nutrition staff to various meetings, functions, and training sessions in Hartford. Currently there are only two-seat cargo vans to transport staff members.

Mr. Taylor said he was struggling with the purchase of the passenger van when the School Volunteer Association could not get money. Ms. Pereira said the van would be funded out of federal grants for the nutrition center, not the operating budget. She said the current vehicles in the fleet are antiquated. Mr. Taylor said there may be something else that better suits the nutrition program.

Ms. Pereira moved *“to approve the solicitation of bids for three delivery vans for use by the nutrition center.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Mr. Taylor moved *“to separate the question.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sokolovic moved *“to approve to go out to bid for a 2020 18-foot refrigerated box truck.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira moved *“to go out to solicit proposals for a cargo van.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

Ms. Pereira moved *“to go out to solicit proposals for a passenger van.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

Mr. Testani said he was in support of the motion. Ms. Pereira

said if the employees took their own vehicles they'd charge mileage and they would be protected by the board's insurance policy when in a board vehicle. Mr. Gerrity said many of the employees at the nutrition center do not have their own vehicle.

The motion was approved by a 5-3 vote. Voting in favor were members Weldon, Pereira, Sokolovic, Lombard and Martinez. Voting in opposition were members Allen, Taylor, and Illingworth.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to move the agenda item concerning the agreement with Fones School of Dental Hygiene to the Facilities Committee."* She noted she saw errors with the agreement and the matter has not gone to a committee. She said it was not an urgent item.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and approved by a 7-1 vote.

Voting in favor were members Sokolovic, Pereira, Illingworth, Weldon, Allen, Lombard, and Martinez. Mr. Taylor was opposed.

Mr. Testani said the MOU for the high school athletic directors was being extended from last year. He said the directors also do the work of the citywide athletic director position. He said nothing has changed from last year.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the start date of their duties is September 1st with anything done over the summer on their own time.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to approve the MOU for high school athletic directors for the 2019-20 school year on the*

condition that the date be inserted." The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez.

The motion was approved by a 7-1 vote. Voting in favor were members Sokolovic, Pereira, Illingworth, Weldon, Allen, Lombard, and Martinez. Mr. Taylor was opposed.

Mr. Testani said there is a BEA position in the contract that contains a gospel choir director, which does not exist at Bassick. He said Mr. Jonathan Garcia at Bassick was doing an amazing job with a jazz band. He said the MOU, which was a great idea, was requested to use the \$885 stipend for the jazz band director for the school year.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the stipend positions are in the appendix of the BEA contract

Ms. Martinez moved *"to move forward with the MOU for the Bassick High School jazz band director."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Allen.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to amend the motion to approve the jazz band director of Bassick High School, moving the allocated \$885 stipend from the gospel choir to the jazz band director position for the '19-'20 school year."* The amendment was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The motion as amended was unanimously approved.

Mr. Testani said similar to what was done at Central High there is a need for an extra math class at the Aquaculture School. The teacher has agreed to teach the sixth period for a stipend equal to one sixth of his annual salary.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the MOU was

submitted to him late, right before the last board meeting. He said he did not know if the teacher is being paid or will receive retroactive payments.

In response to a question, he said the teacher is teaching survey and analysis, which requires a certified math teacher.

Ms. Pereira moved *“to approve the MOU for the Aquaculture mathematics teacher for the 2019-20 school year.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod