

Monday, April 25, 2022

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held March 28, 2022, at Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science & Technology Education Center, 60 Saint Stephens Road, Bridgeport, Connecticut Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m.

Present were Chair John Weldon, Vice Chair Bobbi Brown, Secretary Joseph Lombard Joseph Sokolovic, and Albert Benejan, Erika Castillo** and Christine Baptiste-Perez*.

(*remote participation; **remote participation and in-person - arrival noted below)

Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Weldon announced the sad news of the passing of the Rob Arnold, the executive director of specialized instruction. Supt. Testani said Mr. Arnold worked in the district for 18 years as a school psychologist, director of school psychological services, and twice as director of specialized instruction. He said he was a dedicated employee and a good man.

Mr. Benejan said because the board works likes a team and a family, he wanted to note the passing for Supt. Testani's mother and his father-in-law.

STUDENTN REPREESENTIATVE REPORTS:

Danielle Marseille from Bassick High School reported on her school. She said the National Honor Society conducted

successful fundraising and held a ceremony. She thanked the PTSO and Mr. Benejan. The SAT/PSAT day was successful.

Ms. Castillo arrived in person at the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Jeanne Malquiglio said Beth Furnari has not returned as principal at Fairchild Wheeler after thirty days being away. She said she has previously spoken on Ms. Furnari's impact on her son and other IT students and the need for her to return.

Denise George said she was requesting the board's support for Ms. Furnari. She said our confidence in Mr. Testani was null and void and she asked the board to hold him accountable. She cited what she said were lies by Supt. Testani. She said he blamed Ms. Furnari for his decisions, including unilaterally deciding to cancel a trip to Germany and Switzerland. She claimed the superintendent threatened a student with being kicked out of school after a protest. She said Monroe students did go on the trip and she was told they had the experience of a lifetime, which was denied to Bridgeport students. She said Ms. Furnari was healthy and well sitting in an office in downtown Bridgeport. She said legal action would be taken if reimbursement did not occur.

Julia Doherty said teacher retention is a national problem. She said leadership, stability and culture in a building is very important to teacher retention. She said these things have been shaken by the long absence of Ms. Furnari from the school. She said the teachers are respectfully requesting an update on the return of Ms. Furnari. She added that she

really loved working at the school and really loved Bridgeport.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES:

Mr. Benejan moved approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of April 11, 2022. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown and unanimously approved.

CHAIR REPORT:

Mr. Weldon said he attended the very impressive event organized by Bridgeport Public Schools, Parks and Recreation, and Caribe Youth Leaders for the middle school basketball league banquet.

Mr. Weldon said the City's Council Budget and Appropriations Committee will be having a public hearing for the 2022-23 citywide budget on this Wednesday. He said everyone in the public has an opportunity to stand up for our budget.

COMMITTEE REPORTS/REFERRALS:

Ms. Brown said the Ad Hoc Districtwide Branding Initiative Committee met last month and is looking forward to future items on the district's logo. The next meeting will be on May 18th.

Mr. Weldon said the Contracts Committee will meet soon to address the transportation contract.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Educational Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee will meet on May 16th.

Mr. Sokolovic said the Finance Committee will hold one last community forum tomorrow night.

Mr. Weldon said the Governance Committee will meet on May 2nd.

Mr. Benejan said the Students & Families Committee will meet on April 28th.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said the date of the next Teaching & Learning Committee will be announced. Mr. Sokolovic referred a special education update to the committee.

Mr. Weldon said the ad hoc committee on school holidays will consist of Joseph Lombard(chair), Erika Castillo, and Michael Maccarone.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Supt. Testani said David Viesto, a math teacher at Fairchild Wheeler Aerospace, has been selected, based on an essay submission, as one of the winners of the Disney Imagination Campus. He said Mr. Viesto was also the Central High track coach and a former Magnet Schools of America teacher of the year in 2020 for Region 1.

The superintendent thanked the staff at Harding High and central office staff for their generosity in supporting the family of the young lady who was lost tragically prior to the break. Over \$2,000 were raised to help with funeral costs.

OLD BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was on discussion and possible approval of revised policy regarding public comment. Mr.

Weldon said the updated text was provided to the board. He said he received information from CABA (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education), and the staff attorney provided updated language on page 2. He said his recommendation is to say to protect the impartiality of the board the board will not hear public comment that involves a complaint about a board of education personnel, students, a student disciplinary matter or pending litigation.

Mr. Lombard said there was an issue as occurred tonight in comments where the personnel involved is the superintendent. Mr. Weldon said the language could be altered to exclude the superintendent.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested the reference to complaints should be a current or standing complaint because of the possibility of the board having to rule impartially on a matter, so as not to preclude comments on possibly important items.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez said she agreed with Mr. Sokolovic. She questioned why the board should not hear complaints such as the public comment we just had today, which included new information for the board. She said the board was the superintendent's employer and we need to hear about complaints related to him.

Mr. Weldon suggested returning the matter to the Governance Committee for a discussion with the attorney who crafted the language.

Ms. Brown moved "*to put it back to Governance for continued work.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Castillo and unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS:

The next agenda item was to vote to approve or disapprove Resolution for Schools and Libraries Universal Services (E-Rate) for 2022-23. This resolution authorizes filing of the Form 471 applications for funding year 2022-23 and the payment of the applicant's share upon approval of funding and receipt of services.

Jeff Postolowski, director of ITS, said this is a yearly submission of Form 471, which pays the lion's share of the district's funding for internet and purchase of hardware that runs the network. He said it is handled through a bid and submitted to the city purchasing department.

In response to questions, Mr. Postolowski said this represented the lowest bid and the rates were roughly comparable to last year except for price increases for the equipment.

Mr. Postolowski said the district gets a 90 percent discount in category one and receives an 85 percent discount in category two.

In response to a question, Mr. Postolowski said the board does not pay for the portion that covers library, only schools and BOE buildings.

Ms. Baptiste-Perez moved *"to approve the Resolution for Schools and Libraries Universal Services (E-Rate) for 2022-23."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Benejan and unanimously approved.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

