

Tuesday, October 5, 2021

MINUTES OF THE FACILITIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 5, 2021, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:34 p.m.

Committee members present were Chair John Weldon, Joe Sokolovic, and Albert Benejan. Board member Joe Lombard joined the meeting subsequently as noted.

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Benejan moved approval of the minutes of the meeting of May 3, 2021. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sokolovic and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the efforts to reopen schools for the school year.

Supt. Testani gave kudos to Jorge Garcia, Robert Hammond, Mike Zirkel, and the rest of the team for their efforts in building operations and facilities. He said a tremendous amount of work had been done on the interior and exterior of buildings over the last few months.

Mr. Benejan said he agreed.

Mr. Garcia, director of building operations/facilities/maintenance, said the team has really stepped up. He said this was a summer for the record books. He noted, due to the lack of available private moving companies, the custodial staff had to move furniture and

reestablish classrooms, in addition to their normal duties. He said a lot of spaces that had been cluttered over the years were cleared out.

Mr. Garcia said the staffing of the department has changed drastically over the years. He said management team in 2010 had nine personnel; now there are only three managers. The support staff has dwindled down to three. The trade staff is down to 18.5 personnel, with the size of the district calling for about 45 according to industry standards. He said the custodial staff had likewise been reduced over the years.

Mr. Garcia said one position being explored is to have sub custodians similar to sub security guards. The superintendent said we're looking to hire ten custodians, with a certain percentage of sub custodians. He said Mr. Garcia is working on a work-study program to utilize high school students to support custodians. He described the opportunities the students would have through the program.

Mr. Garcia said there are people in the department who do not follow best practices. He said additional training is being given, but some people have to be weeded out due to the lack of staff.

Mr., Garcia said the logistics staff handles mail, PPE, custodial supplies, furniture movement, and deliveries to and from schools, along with landscaping.

Mr. Sokolovic said from 2010 to 2021 the district lost 66 percent of the management team, 50 percent of support staff, about 28 percent of trade staff, and about 20 percent of custodial staff. Supt. Testani said the department had probably been hit the hardest by budgetary cuts, while at the

same time opening newer and larger buildings. He said it was important to have a better process in hiring. He said nepotism and similar practices are done.

Mr. Garcia said the summer project list was astronomical. He noted a spreadsheet was provided to the committee. The big projects included repointing four buildings, which was funded by old capital accounts; refinishing gym floors, with 7 completed and 17 more to be done after the holidays; and new fiber in every playground.

Mr. Garcia said the demolition of a trailer at Marin School is being looked at. He described trailers as money pits. He noted the Marin roof has been replaced. He added four parking lots have been sealed. The welcome center was also created this summer. He described a donation of furniture worth \$125,000 that was received for the welcome center and other spaces.

Mr. Garcia said one of the biggest challenges is HVAC, which represents a large component of expenditure. Assessments have been conducted and the next step is determining the longstanding solutions.

Mr. Garcia said energy conservation was also point of emphasis. He said energy savings are intended to squeeze every single dollar out of the department. An energy program through UI started at six schools this summer. Mike Zirkel said UI was footing 80 percent of the costs. Hooker and Blackham have been completed; Batalla is in progress; and Beardsley, Black Rock and Skane will be done at some point in November. This retrofits all existing light fixtures to LED. There will be \$186,000 a year in savings for those six schools.

Mr. Garcia said the goal is to save \$750,000 over five years in various energy projects.

Mr. Garcia demonstrated the enhancement of the Claytor building after the upgraded lighting and Supt. Testani showed the lighting improvement at Read School.

Mr. Garcia said the approach is to ask vendors who do business with the district to give something back.

Mr. Garcia discussed air purification. He said schools without HVAC systems particularly need air exchange. A Covid committee selected Fellows air purification devices for cafeterias. He said there is a gauge on the units that demonstrate its effectiveness for students and teachers to see. Supt. Testani described how the units reduce the amount of dust.

Mr. Garcia said phase one covers cafeterias; phase two will see units in every classroom in the district. He said it is hoped to complete the classroom units by the end of next week. The third phase will cover main offices and nurses' offices. Phase four will fill in gaps.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said the expenditure with Fellows was about \$1.7 million. Mr. Garcia said ESSER funding was used. The superintendent noted how quiet the unit being displayed was, which is important to teaching and learning.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the electrical infrastructure in buildings will be able to handle the use of the units because the power draw is minimal.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the units enhance

HVAC systems because it exchanges that much more air. He said the district religiously changes filters in HVAC systems with verification processes in place. He said there are four HVAC technicians for a district of about four million square feet. He said boilers have been redone at Skane, Hall, and Blackham. Curiale will be done next.

Mr. Garcia said Storm Ida hit the district hard, including water occurring in places where we typically don't get water. Classical Studies Annex had to be shut down for a day or two. He said the staff really worked their tails off on it. There was water in the JFK band room and the High Horizons cafeteria. He said a product called luxury vinyl tile (LTV) has been installed in the cafeteria at High Horizons. LTV does not require stripping and waxing, so it is being considered in other locations.

Mr. Garcia said there are conversations with FEMA to obtain reimbursement for damage in Storm Ida.

In response to a question, there was a discussion of the tradeoffs between carpet and tiles, including the cost of maintenance.

Mr. Lombard joined the meeting.

Mr. Garcia said there had been a tremendous work in the district at landscaping. He noted the decorative work done around Central High and the impact on education. He said mulch beds are being used for the first time around the district. There have been plantings in bare areas at Bassick, Dunbar, and Johnson.

Mr. Garcia said miscellaneous items include approaching the city about paving at Marin and the JFK campus.

Mr. Garcia said this summer every department member has been fitted for uniforms and they are now being delivered. He said it is important for people to be able to identify the department's personnel.

Mr. Garcia said unneeded dumpsters were purged from the district. Indoor areas were also purged to create more space. He said bottle-fill stations for the high schools are on order but reasonable lead times for obtaining items has been difficult.

Mr. Garcia said the construction fence for the new Bassick is up and there has been a meeting with the demolition and abatement company. He said the state contract numbers were in the district's favor.

Mr. Garcia said ten new vehicles for the department were brought in through capital funding. He said there has been Covid training for head custodians. He noted the biggest piece of the department is the personnel. Certification is being offered to some district custodians through Eastern Bag & Paper. Tablets have been issued to custodians for orders and communications through Teams.

In response to a question about Hall and Edison Schools, Mr. Garcia said a facilities master plan was needed.

Mr. Benejan said this is the type of report he likes to receive. He thanked Mr. Garcia and his team for their work.

Mr. Weldon noted district policies call for expenditures of over \$25,000 require board approval. He questioned if that exact process was followed if this amount of work would have gotten done over the summer. He said we need to a

strong look at the level of board involvement in these kinds of things.

Mr. Weldon suggested putting together an RFP for the services of an estimating firm to help on the bids such as those for paving. Mr. Garcia said he agreed on this need. He noted the difficulty in obtaining emergency authorizations for expenditure by the purchasing department.

The next agenda item was on mitigating extreme heat conditions in buildings. The superintendent said 180 days of school are mandated. He said even short of removing all possible vacation days, there is no way we can start and finish school in a cool season. He said there were a significant number of buildings without air-conditioning, including Park City Magnet, Blackham, Winthrop, Skane, Hall, and Edison. He noted the district needs a swing space to build new schools. New HVAC systems in current schools cost \$5 million and up. He said due to PCBs, the current Bassick buildings could not be used for future swing space. He described how a new Park City Magnet School, with Skane incorporated, could be built on the existing site.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said remote days during snow cancellations are not possible per the state department of education.

Mr. Benejan asked why security has not been placed on the agenda. He said he would like to hear a report such as Mr. Garcia gave. Mr. Weldon said security includes sensitive areas. He said it would be helpful to be told what kinds of things about security are being requested. He said previous questions about overtime were answered. Mr. Sokolovic said sensitive areas could be handled in executive session.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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