

Wednesday, June 29, 2022

MINUTES OF THE FACILITIES COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held June 29, 2022, at Central High School, 1 Lincoln Boulevard, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m.

Committee members present were Chair John Weldon, Michael Maccarone* and Albert Benejan. Board member Joe Sokolovic was present.
(*remote participation)

Superintendent Michael J. Testani was present.

Mr. Benejan moved approval of the minutes of the meeting of March 1, 2022. The motion was seconded by Mr. Maccarone and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a presentation on the stewardship report.

Jorge Garcia, director of building operations and facilities management, presented. He said the report was to give everyone an idea of the magnitude of the department, its responsibilities, and an overview of the staff numbers and historical data.

Mr. Garcia said the size of the district is 3.7 million square feet and 299 acres. He said the report covers the size of each school, the year it was built, renovation date (if any), and staff information. He said currently the department is understaffed by 25 to 28 custodial personnel due to retirements and workers' compensation.

Mr. Garcia said in 2010 the management team had nine members; in 2013, three; in 2015, five; and is currently at two managers. He said Mr. Hamond, the assistant director, retired today after a career of 38 years. He said Mr. Hammond was a tremendous asset to the district. He said a reorganization will be presented to the superintendent within a few weeks. He said support staff has also been reduced over the years. In 2010, there were 25 trades personnel, which has been reduced to 18.5.

Mr. Garcia said the custodial staff in 2010 consisted of 186 personnel but is currently about 132. He said the district really needs 169 custodians to cover the current schedule.

Supt. Testani said there are discussions on adding manpower without increasing the budget and ideas have been presented to labor relations and the bargaining unit.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the amount of square feet covered by each custodian is not uniform due to different buildings and different equipment. He said different vintages of buildings call for different square footage levels per staff member.

Mr. Garcia said the logistics team is vital to the staff. They are responsible for landscaping, school-to-school moves, deliveries, and warehousing. The staff reached eight members, but is now down to three people, with some summer help coming in through The Workplace.

Mr. Garcia said several layers have been introduced into the HR process to obtain better employees.

Mr. Garcia said there are currently three carpenters, four

electricians, two glazers, two masons, four HVAC workers, 2.5 painters, one asbestos person, one plumber, and one roofer. He said there is not currently a supervisor directly appointed to the trades.

Mr. Garcia said plant operations and maintenance costs by 2012 were below the state level, but this was now trending in the right direction. He said there is a strong effort to use all funds efficiently.

Mr. Garcia said summer initiatives include automating custodial operations, including online training. He said this will include a database of when personnel are trained. Head custodians will be making daily reports.

Mr. Garcia said solar projects are being looked at for Central High, Luis Marin, and Geraldine Claytor. Four projects will be started through the MOU with UI this summer, with the goal of completing seven schools by the end of the fiscal year. Savings of between \$250,000 and \$350,000 are anticipated.

Mr. Garcia said in the past season \$315,000 was saved in energy, including LED upgrades and UI's Distressed Cities program. He said buildings have provided positive feedback about schools being brighter.

Mr. Garcia said the department is involved in almost every school construction meeting. He noted Central High has an undersized chiller, so he is making sure that will not happen again at the new Bassick. He said the Bassick design will retain three boilers in case there is an issue with the thermal loop.

Mr. Garcia said there have been two employee certification

classes for cleaning, which covers best practices. He described other training that will be offered.

Mr. Garcia said the department was prepared regarding Covid for the upcoming season, including filter changes on air purifiers and HVAC units. He said preventive maintenance is being emphasized in HVAC. He noted a delay in delivery of the new chiller at Tisdale School.

Mr. Garcia said a lot of asbestos work is going on through ESSER funding, including at Park City Magnet, JFK and Read. Read will also receive lighting upgrades.

Mr. Garcia said a/c programs at Cross and Columbus Schools are progressing and will be going out to bid, with ESSER funding available.

Mr. Garcia said water bottle fill stations will be completely installed for the new school year.

Mr. Garcia said he is working with Trane on chiller renewal projects, which come with five-year warranties. This frees up district personnel to do other HVAC work.

Mr. Benejan thanked Mr. Garcia and said he had not seen another staff member do as complete a report.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said staff had been lost because other towns pay substantially more than Bridgeport. He said the superintendent's leadership led to the department getting ten maintainers. He said interviews are continuing to find the right candidates, but the effort is to find high-quality candidates. He said it is hoped to create a program next summer to recruit and hire students who are interested in this type of work.

Mr. Benejan said in some cases staff have to do custodians' jobs for them. Mr. Garcia said the goal is to get everyone on the same page through training, with the ability to have personnel retake the training and receive in-services. He said the best chemical on the market is being used, with head custodians being certified in it.

Supt. Testani said in that last quarter of the year there were efforts to hold staff accountable. He said he meets biweekly with facilities and HR in his office to address lapses. Mr. Garcia said these meetings were a game-changer, which helped remotivating and reinvigorating the staff. He said there are quarterly meetings with the head custodians, and feedback is encouraged. He said some of the best ideas that have been implemented have come from suggestions from the ranks, and they are encouraged by an open-door policy.

In response to a question about some instances of laziness by custodians, Mr. Garcia said he is trying to break that mindset with a level playing field.

In response to a question about air conditioning at Cesar Batalla School, Mr. Garcia said the design was gutted from the original theory. He said the system was designed to carry 60 percent of the large facility, which includes high ceilings. He said refrigerant and sensor issues are being dealt with now. He said the new chiller is being oversized prior to the bidding process. He added that there are exorbitant lead times for some equipment. He said there was a meeting on heating recently to get ahead of that issue.

Mr. Garcia said industry issues have put a damper on a lot of what we want to do this summer. He said manufacturers and suppliers are often understaffed. Although some prices have

stabilized, items that contain computer chips remain problematic.

Supt. Testani said the report created in February identified work needed on Cross, Columbus, and Batalla, but there were delays due to contracts being held in the city attorney's office. Berchem Moses was brought in to help speed up the process.

Supt. Testani said an issue regarding a grant written to pay for a soccer field at Batalla was the result of a state-imposed deadline and an inaccurate price estimate by a contractor. The money was given back to the state and the contractor was never paid due to misrepresentations.

Mr. Maccarone said he believed Mr. Garcia had done a good job.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said if employees who become certified or licensed leave the district, it means we're breeding the best and developing a culture where people are happy. Mr. Sokolovic said in his former job some employees' licenses were only valid onsite.

The next agenda item was a facilities condition report on Hall and Edison Schools.

Supt. Testani said there had been discussions in previous administrations that looked at closing facilities as a cost-saving measure. He said he had walked buildings with Mr. Garcia and other facilities personnel. He said the buildings were looked at from a programmatic standpoint. He said he finds they are not an appropriate building programmatic to continue forward with children. He said the gymnasium at Hall is very small and has safety issues, which is a restriction

to physical education. There is only one boys' room and one girls' room, both located in the basement. He said old radiators get extremely hot and have to be caged in. here are slop sinks and storage cases in the middle of the hallways.

The superintendent said both schools are under enrolled and don't have physical attributes of newer buildings. He said Edison was built in 1935 and Hall built in 1914. Between the two schools, there are 90,000 square feet with a total enrollment slightly above 300. Mr. Garcia said both schools are about 40 percent of capacity. He said both schools would require significant capital outlays to keep them operating.

Supt. Testani said the low occupancy rates are because of the numbers of kids in those neighborhoods, which results in large classrooms with few students. There are also technological updates that can't be done because the buildings are so old.

Mr. Garcia said the state is on us about the schools not being ADA-compliant and they are threatening to hold money back. The superintendent said at some point the state will stop reimbursing projects without ADA standards.

In response to a question, Supt. Testani said there is enough property at Park City Magnet to build a new school. He said Skane needs significant upgrades. Mr. Garcia said Classical Studies was the oldest school in the district. The superintendent said the new Bassick will allow the move of Classical Studies into BMA's current location. He said the 1100 students at Blackham could not be relocated while a renovation as new would take place.

Mr. Garcia said a facilities master plan was needed. Mr. Weldon said the mayor's office wanted to do that about two years ago, and he suggested they be reengaged. The superintendent said data management has new software that could help move boundary lines for schools. He said some schools are bursting at the seams while nearby schools have room.

In response to a question about Hall and Edison, Mr. Garcia said the long-term solution is a facilities master plan. He said some staff would have to be dedicated to the master plan to help expedite the process.

Supt. Testani said Mr. Benejan brought up a good point about the stairwells, which are extremely dangerous. He said he would forward photos to the committee. Mr. Benejan said the principal's office is very small. He said Bryant School was built in 1912; Madison in 1916; and BLC in 1895. Mr. Garcia said Madison was in fairly good condition after a renovation.

Mr. Benejan said he would contact Mr. Garcia about safety issues that have been brought to him by parents.

Supt. Testani said Beardsley School has an issue because there is a shared driveway with a new Pep Boys building. He said the Marin enrollment should be dropping significant due to a policy where new students from outside the country will be sent to neighborhood schools.

Mr. Garcia said the asbestos project at Park City Magnet was started after a parent raised the issue. He said he encourages everyone to bring issues to the attention of facilities.

In response to a question about enrollment, Supt. Testani said over time some schools have reallocated space to offices. He said probably a half a dozen are solidly under enrolled, including Hooker, Dunbar, Hall, Edison, and Beardsley. He said there are a lot of special needs classrooms at Tisdale and a lesser enrollment would be desirable.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested looking at adding another school because a budget crisis will be faced shortly. He said the maintenance staff is being stretched out more and more. He noted there were significant steps required in order to close a school. Supt. Testani said that is why he has started the conversation now. He said due to the transiency of the population the K-6 schools in question do not typically have students that stay in the schools for seven years.

Mr. Weldon asked the city to be reengaged on this topic. He said the 2000 master plan is what gave us all the new schools.

Mr. Benejan asked about holding a meeting on security. Mr. Weldon said there was a two-hour executive session on security recently. Mr. Benejan said his concerns were not addressed. Mr. Weldon said the questions Mr. Benejan e-mailed could have been asked in the meeting. Mr. Benejan said he would like a meeting open to the public. Mr. Weldon said security is a sensitive issue and some things cannot be discussed openly. Mr. Benejan said Mr. Weldon was ignoring him.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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