

Monday, February 5, 2018

MINUTES OF THE FACILITIES COMMITTEE OF THE
BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held February 5, 2018, at
Bassick High School, 1181 Fairfield Avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:31 p.m.

Committee members present were Chair Chris Taylor and Hernan Illingworth. Board members Maria Pereira, Jessica Martinez and Joseph Sokolovic were present. Committee member John Weldon arrived subsequently as noted.

Mr. Illingworth moved approval of the minutes of the meeting of January 10, 2018. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

The next item was the Harding High Early Learning Center RFP.

Ms. Pereira said she was concerned because the item was just sent out Friday to board members.

Tony Pires suggested the board review it to see if it was something they were comfortable with. He said issuing the RFP would be via standard procedure.

Mr. Illingworth said he reviewed it and was okay with moving forward with it. Mr. Taylor said he was not comfortable moving forward and said he believed the community deserved the full resources of the board. He said he could not move forward on it until he receives unbiased feedback from community members or educators.

Natasha Vidal, teen pregnancy social worker for the district, said the purpose of the center is to provide licensed child care for teen parents at the new Harding and throughout the district, as well as to provide some opportunity for the community to use the center. She said the students at Harding who are parents will be the primary clientele. She said the goal is to increase our teens' graduation rates and daily attendance within the building.

In response to a question, Ms. Vidal said a student at Bassick who wanted to come to Harding, if they were a parent, could control transfer to Harding. She said the long-range goal is to build in some college credit and develop a partnership with Housatonic.

Dementred Young, director of social work, said the student parents will be able to volunteer at the early learning center.

Mr. Weldon arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Vidal said there would be a capacity of 24 students, infants and toddlers. She said transportation for operating the center was requested as part of the RFP.

In response to a question, Ms. Vidal said she anticipated agencies such as ABCD, St. Mark's, Precious Memories and others might be interested in responding to the RFP.

In response to a question, Mr. Pires said it would take close to a month for agencies to prepare a response to the RFP, which would be followed by the evaluation process of scoring, awarding, and board approval. He said that could probably be completed by the end of April or the beginning of May.

Mr. Taylor said due to the recent Jason Negrón situation his focus was to end the school-to-prison pipeline, which is now the school-to-the-graveyard pipeline. He asked if the program included instruction on how to interact with the police department. Ms. Vidal said that had not been considered. Mr. Young said the goal of the program is to keep the students in school and that aspect could be looked at.

Mr. Taylor said nowhere in the United States is it murder for driving an alleged stolen car or not having a license.

Mr. Sokolovic suggested approving an RFP at this point and bringing it to the full board, which will leave time for board members to digest it. Ms. Pereira said she agreed.

Mr. Taylor said this was a complex subject that he was not well

versed in. He said he can't go blindly into something that could impact a mother and her child. He said it was not fair to any board member to give them the information on this two days ago. He said he would like to defer the matter to the next Facilities Committee meeting.

Mr. Weldon said it was the committee's job to vet the item at the committee level before it gets to the full board.

Mr. Illingworth said people are preparing documents for agendas. He said if the board wants documents well in advance of a meeting the direction needs to come from the board. He said a perception had to be created that documents were needed a month in advance of agenda items. Mr. Taylor said he agreed.

Mr. Weldon moved to postpone the item to the next committee meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

Mr. Illingworth moved that item 5 be handled next. The motion was seconded by Mr. Taylor and unanimously approved.

The agenda item was on naming the Harding High School football field.

Tom Coble, a Harding graduate, said he played football at Harding and went to college because of Coach John Lewis. He said a number of people put a petition online requesting the stadium be named after Coach Lewis.

Mr. Coble said Mr. Wallack and Ms. Pereira were very helpful in the process of bringing the issue forward.

Ted Walton said he played for Coach Lewis at Harding, attended the University of Connecticut, where he was captain of the football team, and played in the NFL. He said the two persons who influenced him the most were his father and John Lewis. He said he taught his own sons many lessons from Coach Lewis.

City Council member Ernest Newton said he couldn't think of a better

person to name a stadium after than Coach Lewis. He said John Lewis touched many students' lives, not just athletes, and many of his students went on to be professionals. He said he often ate breakfast with Mr. Lewis. He said Mr. Lewis was the only person who could walk through Father Panik Village or P.T. Barnum without any problem. He also urged the gym be named after Charlie Bentley.

Gerard Pugh said he knew Coach Lewis on a personal level. He said there could not be a better person to name the stadium after.

Dr. Ralph Ford, Democratic leader for the East End, said he did not graduate from Harding, but he knew John Lewis since he was 17 years old. Dr. Ford said he was a fraternity brother of Mr. Lewis and noted his participation in mentoring and community projects.

Mark Perkins, a Harding High graduate and UConn graduate, said she was a nephew of John Lewis. He said he also coached at Harding High. He said Mr. Lewis was his father figure. He said Mr. Lewis was an advocate of education and led over 200 people in the direction of college. He said Coach Lewis is buried right behind the stadium in Lakeview Cemetery.

Ms. Pereira said she was a 1985 graduate of Harding when Coach Lewis was a coach there. She said she was shocked to learn that he passed away in 1989.

Ms. Pereira said the board was required to form a committee, which would include community members. She said Coach Lewis was an amazing person who was respected by all students.

Mr. Taylor said he was in support of the motion and appreciated all the Harding people coming out.

Mr. Illingworth noted the board policy on naming facilities calls for the superintendent to name a committee.

Mr. Weldon moved *"to refer to the full board the creation of a committee for naming of the new Harding High football field, with special consideration being given to Coach Lewis."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

The next item was on the long-range master plan. Alan Wallack said he provided a copy of the 2003 plan to the board members as a point of reference, along with some other documentation. He said an RFQ or RFP would be needed unless the purchasing department allowed the district to continue on with the same firm.

Mr. Wallack said the prior plan would have to be updated; involving a visit of two or three days, meeting with the superintendent and finding the scope of work. He said such a plan could cost fifty to sixty thousand dollars, but an update would be significantly less, perhaps ten to twelve thousand dollars.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said at some point someone from the city facilities department said they would pay for the master plan either in whole or in part. He said he would look into that.

Ms. Pereira said the district had done a lot of work in the last ten years and a current plan was needed.

Mr. Taylor said he would like to see community involvement in the master plan.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said Mr. Ricci contributed \$30,000 to rebuilding the weight room at Bassick High.

Mr. Taylor said he favored moving forward provided the city agreed to pay for the master plan and that there was community involvement. He said he was not in favor of a fifty-fifty split with the city on the cost.

Mr. Wallack said the last master plan was 2010, which involved \$750 million of construction. The plan would address the possibility of closing schools, building new schools, and community input, among other things.

In response to a question, Mr. Wallack said the last master plan included Bassick, the Central High renovation, Discovery Magnet, the swing space, and other projects that have taken place in the district.

Mr. Wallack said he would give the cost information to the

superintendent.

Mr. Sokolovic said if the city would not finance the plan, the board's failure to fund such a plan could lead to even greater expenditure down to the road for something that was not anticipated. Mr. Wallack said he agreed money was tight, but he believed we could find \$10,000.

Mr. Taylor said we couldn't find \$5,000 for Bridgeport Military Academy's washer and dryer for their uniforms.

Ms. Pereira said an expenditure under \$25,000 did not require a bid.

Mr. Taylor said there was a lack of fiscal responsibility in city hall and at the board. He said he would support the expenditure if Mr. Ricci wants to pay for it. Ms. Pereira said she would be willing to contact Mr. Ricci to ask him. Mr. Wallack said he would talk to Mr. Ricci tomorrow.

Mr. Wallack said there was enough talent among the district's administrators to update the plan ourselves if funding could not be obtained.

Board members said they did not believe a motion was required for Mr. Wallack to move forward with gathering more information.

The next agenda item was on the culture and climate at Bassick High.

Mr. Illingworth said in the last three months or so it seemed like there were more fights at Bassick than normal. He said the type of fights were concerning as well. He said he wanted to be supportive if steps such as an extra security guard were needed. He said he was scared to death that someone was going to get drastically hurt. He said he had heard of desks and chairs being thrown, which endangered the staff.

Mr. Illingworth said he saw one video that lasted almost five minutes before a security guard arrived. He said an assistant principal is out hurt because of a fight.

Mr. Taylor said he was a very spiritual person and he received a negative presence walking in the door of Bassick. He said it also smelled of urine, which makes males fight, similar to rams banging heads. He said this was no reflection on the principal whatsoever because this was the hand he was dealt. He said the negative atmosphere is such that he came in here wanting to fight.

Ms. Martinez said she had concerns about the climate and culture in Bassick. She said she was concerned about not only the safety of children, but the staff. She said she received calls from parents and teachers who are concerned, including teachers who have taught in the school for a long time.

Ms. Martinez said we have a lot of great parent leaders and staff in the building. She said the board saw a presentation at a board meeting about Bassick. She said she would like to hear if the whole school and the staff is aware of the use of restorative practices and has buy-in. She said what she sees and hears about the school versus the presentation hurts her heart.

Ms. Martinez said the RULER program should be implemented. She noted she was trained to implement RULER and would help out if called upon.

JoAnn Kennedy was recognized. She said her children were in the school in 2011. She said it was a tale of two schools. She said the climate has changed since Dr. Williams has been here and the community supports him wholeheartedly.

Ms. Kennedy said more security and more policing is not always the answer. Comprehensive programs are needed to show children different ways. She said there were way more positive things going on such as the upcoming book fair and a visit by an author.

Ms. Martinez said she spends a lot of time in Bassick and said she agreed there are a lot of positive things going on. She said it was not about Dr. Williams, but about the students. She said she looked forward to the restorative justice practice being successful.

Albert Benejan was recognized. He said he was the PTSO president at Bassick. He said there were fights in the school and there are positive things, but more security was needed. He said the security here did an amazing job, but they needed more support. He said he often locks his door while eating lunch and teachers do the same thing.

Mr. Weldon said he believed Mr. Illingworth's concern was to make there be less negative things. He said it was possible that the negative was being blown out of proportion because of social media, but we still need to look at it.

Principal Dr. Byron Williams said he the bathrooms were deplorable at Bassick, but he did not have the feeling that he wanted to fight anybody. He said he often let students use his own bathroom.

Dr. Williams said we were fighting history because the school was this way long before this year. He added mindsets needed to be changed. He said there are over a thousand students in the school and what appears in the videos are aberrations. He said the issues often arise from students that come from the Greenes having issues with others from P.T. or vice versa. He said he was not trying to sugarcoat anything, but the majority of students are in class.

Dr. Williams said the school had students known as post-graduates who are 18, 19 and 20 years old, which present challenges. He said many had been in the school for five or six years.

Dr. Williams said he believed restorative justice and mediations work.

Dr. Williams said because the school had two buildings and was large, the security guards often had a long route to get to an incident. He said after a young man was killed in October, disputes between kids from the Greenes and P.T. led to an incident in the school. He said that incident was controlled and a lot of kids were protected.

Dr. Williams said when he arrived at the school five months ago many students used language to curse him, but that is no longer the case. He noted the increase in the number of students taking AP chemistry and AP physics.

Assistant Superintendent John Lischner said one fight was one fight too many. He said he noticed a great improvement in the school since he first saw it in August. He said Ms. Kennedy did a great job of highlighting the great things that were going on.

Mr. Lischner noted that the earlier speakers spoke about the impact John Lewis had on students' lives, not about his record as a coach. He said there are eight security guards in the school, while Harding, Fairchild Wheeler and Central have seven guards with larger enrollments.

Mr. Lischner said we have to be very careful that we don't bring the school-to-prison pipeline into the school. He said he was not in favor of adding twenty or thirty more security guards to the school.

Dr. Williams noted he had passed out data on suspension data. Mr. Lischner said he could work with Dr. Williams on security arrangements, including perhaps SRO assignments. He said he believed Dr. Williams and Mr. Sistrunk, a security guard, had things pretty well squared away.

Dr. Williams said there has been 214 in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in the school year to date. He said last year the school had close to 600.

Ms. Pereira said the district hired Dr. Pedro Noguera, a renowned expert, to do a study of Harding High in 2010 that showed it didn't matter how many security guards were in a building; it would not fix the culture and climate. What fixes culture and climate is that there are adults in the building who truly care about students and the students feel a connection to those adults. She said she supported the way the district was approaching the situation. She said this was similar to the way John Lewis managed students through tough love.

Dr. Dan was recognized.

Mr. Weldon said there was no doubt suspensions were trending downward. He said he would be interested in knowing if incidents of violence or fights are also going down. Dr. Williams and Mr. Lischner said that information could be obtained from Power School.

Ms. Pereira said the Bridgeport Police keep that information on a spreadsheet as well.

Mr. Sokolovic said he had toured Bassick. He said he was present during a fire drill and the students were very orderly, which is the school you don't hear about. He said he observed Dr. Williams walking around the building and students complying with rules when they saw him. He said the fights on Facebook might be the squeaky wheels that get the grease.

Dr. Williams said he would like to talk to his team and staff and come back to the board with an answer as to how they could best support the school.

Ms. Martinez said no one wants to highlight the negative, but we can't ignore the negative either. She said she would like to see a survey of all students in the school.

Ms. Martinez said she wanted to make the school a safer space for all. She said she had five videos of five separate fights since the beginning of the school year. In one situation, a security guard was on his own holding a doorway to keep students out and was attacked from behind by students in the classroom.

Ms. Martinez said there was a fight on the day she came to the school for a Christmas event, but it was quickly handled. She said on another occasion she saw an amazing security guard who had developed an excellent relationship with students. She said security guards can become mentors to students.

Ms. Martinez said it was alarming to hear there were 19 and 20 year-old students potentially in classes with 14 year-olds. She said this was a potential problem.

In response to a question, Dr. Williams said some of the students who have created issues are special needs and some are not, but they have issues outside question the school,

Ms. Martinez asked Dr. Williams to see her as a partner.

The next agenda item was on a possible action plan for the Parent Center's furnishings and equipment. There was no one present to speak on the matter.

Mr. Taylor said the board members could do a tour of the school after the meeting was adjourned.

Mr. Weldon moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Illingworth and unanimously approved.

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

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod