

Wednesday, October 23, 2019

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 23, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Committee members present were Chair Jessica Martinez and Maria Pereira. Committee member Joseph Lombard arrived subsequently as noted.

Acting Supt. Michael J. Testani was present.

Ms. Pereira moved approval of the committee's minutes of May 8, 2019, with edits. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez. Corrections were noted.

Mr. Lombard arrived at the meeting.

The motion was approved by a 2-0 vote. Voting in favor were members Ms. Martinez and Ms. Pereira. Mr. Lombard abstained.

Nadira Clarke, director of grants development and management, presented a report in the absence of Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, on the 2019-20 budget. She said there was a net positive effect to report regarding grant revenue.

Ms. Clarke said the loss in the state magnet grant is \$553,622 based on the October 1st register for the four magnet schools. Total enrollment at Fairchild Wheeler is 1,198 compared to 1,391 students in the 2018-19 year.

Ms. Pereira said Discovery Magnet had the longest waiting list of any school in the district.

Ms. Clarke said as of October 1, while the total enrollment remains the same at Discovery Magnet, the suburban enrollment declined from 161 to 147.

Ms. Clarke said the losses will be mitigated by savings derived from the removal of two teachers at the Aerospace School.

Ms. Clarke said the net impact is \$350,000 to \$400,000.

Ms. Clarke said the total magnet tuition is approximately \$1.3 million, down from \$1.4 million in FY19. Four districts continue to not pay tuition to Bridgeport.

Ms. Pereira said the suburban districts were in violation of the law by not letting the district recruit students. Ms. Martinez said there were a lot of things that happened with the suburban districts, including hurting relationships by mistreating the suburban parents and students and not treating them as one of ours. She said we have to build relationships while demanding what is owed to us.

Ms. Pereira said the suburban districts filed a lawsuit against Bridgeport after they were given a year's notice of the tuition charge as required under the statute. She said the superintendent of Stratford led the effort to file a lawsuit against the Bridgeport district.

Mr. Testani said on October 10th he met with the Commissioner of Education in Hartford. He said there was a discussion about the loss of revenue due to the decreased

enrollment. Mr. Testani said he requested an exception be granted similar to that granted to New Haven to allow the admission of more district students into the interdistrict magnet schools. He said he was hopeful that the exception would be granted to offset the revenue lost. He said the commissioner saw both sides of the argument regarding tuition.

Ms. Pereira said the legislation was passed because the sending districts were receiving about \$10,000 in ECS funding, of which only about \$7,000 went to the receiving districts.

Mr. Testani noted despite the loss of 190 students at Fairchild Wheeler only two teachers are reduced due to the realities of high school scheduling.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the enrollment loss was due to lower numbers of incoming students.

Ms. Clarke said the Alliance Grant has an increase about \$200,000, which will enable the maintenance of AP positions at Black Rock and Barnum/Waltersville.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said he believed the board voted to eliminate two assistant principal positions at the superintendent's discretion. Ms. Martinez and Mr. Lombard said that was their recollection as well.

Ms. Clarke said the Title I allocation has increased by \$1.2 million. She said the funds will help to offset the loss in the state magnet grant, special education expenses if savings are not realized, and restore a curriculum technology renewal reserve on a tentative basis until needed in April, and pending verification that the budget is on track to be

balanced by year end.

Ms. Clarke said based on the appropriation of the Title I funds the parent involvement allocation for this year is \$7.20 per pupil. Ms. Pereira said the board voted to fix the amount at one percent as required under the federal law.

Ms. Clarke said the state Priority Grant is up by \$22,123. She said one hourly computer technician has been restored for 19 hours a week.

Ms. Clarke said IDEA funding has not been released yet. Ms. Pereira asked Ms. Clarke to report back on IDEA and Title II.

Ms. Clarke said the fiscal year 2020 budget gap has been revised downwards in view of increased revenue. The district began the school year with a structurally balanced budget, however, the budget will remain in a precarious state throughout the fiscal year due to the continuing under-resourced condition, reserve funds at minimal levels, multiple stressors and competing needs. She said the stress factors include special education and emergency facility needs. The cap on out-of-district expenditures will not be known until late February.

Ms. Clarke said deficit prevention mode remains in effect. She said formal fiscal assessments are published in financial condition reports, with the next one to be completed on October 31st.

In response to a question, John Gerrity, nutrition director, said the supper program will be expanded and will bring additional nutrition revenue to the district.

Ms. Pereira said the additional funding in the Alliance Grant is not locked into the MBR. Ms. Clarke said she would ask Ms. Siegel to report on why the funding is reflected in the Alliance column, not the ECS column.

In response to a question, Mr. Testani said the city has not committed to fund the district's nurses, nor had he heard anything on the city paying the Connecticut Avenue lease. Ms. Pereira said everything that has been done so far is a violation of the law. She said the nurses used to be paid completely by the city, as they are in every other municipality. She said the city also gets a reimbursement from the state on school nurses even though the board is paying for them.

There was a discussion of the possible results of the litigation regarding tuition payments owed to the district. Mr. Testani said he would not bank on getting any of the money except going forward.

The next agenda item was on the 2019 and 2020 Extended School Hours contracts for the Priority Grant for Batalla, Bryant, Claytor and Waltersville.

Victoria Egri, principal of Bryant School, was present. She said this would be the second round of working with the Greater Bridgeport Symphony. She said last spring's program was well received. She said the program will provide academic support and music enrichment in Grades 3 to 6, through an exploration of African-American and Latino heritage. Students will learn drumming this year. The symphony will provide music programs for the whole school community.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said the contract was

sent to Atty. Trachtenberg at the city attorney's office for review.

Ms. Pereira said the dates on the contract needed to be corrected.

Ms. Clarke said the programs would run from February through May.

Ms. Pereira said injury was not mentioned in the liability category.

In response to a question, Ms. Clarke said the background checks referenced in the contract would be sent to the district's HR department.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to approve the contract between the Board of Education with Greater Bridgeport Symphony and Bryant School for the 2019-20 school year."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

Principal Carmen Ortiz and teacher John Cunningham were present from Waltersville School. Ms Ortiz said the proposal was for an after-school creative character lab with TCCI(The Character Connection Initiative). A pilot program was started four years ago and now serves 7th and 8th graders. She said it teaches students good character, and includes a writing component. She said the program originated out of Columbia University.

Ms. Pereira suggested the budget sheet and the details of the programs be provided when the matters come to the full board.

Mr. Cunningham said the program is three days a week after

school from 3:15 to 5:15, so no overtime charges are incurred for security or facilities. He said students are being screened by the iReady benchmarks. The program last for six weeks.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to approve the contract services agreement with The Character Connection Initiative and Waltersville School with the edits discussed."* The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

Ms. Clarke said staff from Cesar Batalla School was invited, but were not present. She said the proposal is for a continuation of last year's program working with Wakeman Memorial Boys and Girls Club. She said the current principal handled all the grant-related things last year when Mr. Sanchez was the principal. The program includes cooking, yoga and fitness classes using the Wakeman Boys and Girls clubs for 144 students in Grades 3 to 8. She said 24 students per grade that are identified as in-need students will participate.

Mr. Testani said he agreed with Ms. Pereira that someone from the schools should be present on the matter. He noted all the contracts did not begin until February. Ms. Martinez said she was in favor of pushing the other two contracts to the full board.

Ms. Pereira moved *"to approve the contract service agreement with Wakeman Memorial Association and the Board of Education/Cesar Batalla School."* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

There was a discussion of the proposal by Geraldine Claytor Magnet Academy. Ms. Clarke confirmed there was no charge for students for the proposed program. Mr. Testani

suggested this contract be postponed to the next meeting to have Mr. Douglas and Mr. Bird in attendance. Ms. Pereira said there some issues with a prior program proposed by Mr. Bird.

Ms. Pereira moved *“to postpone to the next Finance meeting the contract services agreement with Bridgeport Organization for Youth Sports and Geraldine Claytor Magnet School/Board of Education.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was a request from food services for vehicles

Mr. Gerrity said three vehicles were requested; one refrigerated truck, one passenger van, and one cargo van.

Ms. Pereira said the proposed bid was much better than presented last time. She noted brand names were removed from the language. She added that the department's vehicles are very antiquated and have a lot of mileage. She urged the dates in the bid specifications be provided when the matter comes before the full board.

Ms. Pereira said a committee had to be formed to evaluate the bids with a grading process used to award points.

Ms. Pereira moved *“to approve the bid proposals for refrigerated van, a cargo van, and a passenger van to the full board, with the understanding that we will have a bid timeline for the regular board meeting and the bid rating system.”* The motion was seconded by Mr. Lombard and unanimously approved.

Mr. Lombard moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion

was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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