

Wednesday, September 12, 2018

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held September 12, 2018, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 p.m. Committee members present were Chair Jessica Martinez and Chris Taylor.

Superintendent Dr. Aresta L. Johnson was present.

Mr. Taylor moved to approve the committee's minutes of June 13, 2018. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

The first agenda item was on busing concerns. Dr. Johnson said Ms. Pereira referred the item regarding the arrival time of the buses and students coming into the building late.

Rafael Laffitte, director of transportation, said he was working with Mr. Ifill from the vendor. He said he believed the issue has been resolved as of Monday. He said it largely impacted out-of-district students at Fairchild Wheeler from Shelton, Stratford and Milford.

Ms. Martinez said she received calls about the busing situation at Capital Prep. Mr. Laffitte said the students from that school are provided city bus passes. He added the same situation applied to Bassick and Harding.

Mr. Taylor said from being in the trucking business people don't understand the traffic concerns buses face and to be late does happen.

In response to a question, Mr. Laffitte said only special needs children are bused by the district at Bassick and Harding. Mr. Taylor said that did not sound equitable to those schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Laffitte said about sixteen years ago Bassick students received bus passes. Marlene Siegel, chief financial officer, said in most cities high school students ride on city buses. Mr. Laffitte said Greater Bridgeport Transit does not have the equipment and manpower to transport students to Central High. The district uses 17 buses for Central.

In response to a question about attendance rates and student success, Dr. Johnson said there was an article published about a Harding student who had to take two city buses to school and it did not impact his grades. Mr. Taylor said he wondered if he was the exception to the rule.

Mr. Taylor said Councilwoman Christina Smith had a brilliant idea about combating costs. He urged the administration look into her suggestions for cost-savings in transportation. He said Ms. Smith was a reasonable, workable person like Mr. Laffitte.

Mr. Laffitte said a study about fifteen years ago found the use of city bus passes did not impact attendance at all at Bassick. One advantage to city buses is if students miss a bus they come by every twenty minutes in the morning.

The next item was the 2017-18 fiscal year close summary.

Ms. Siegel said the fiscal year was closed in a balanced condition for the seventh consecutive year.

Ms. Siegel said the close entailed the use of funds from the Internal Service Fund of about \$3.6 million. She said fortunately the upward trend in special education enrollment and expenditures were addressed. Special education was approximately 17 percent of enrolment at the end of the fiscal year. She added that the district successfully met goals for rollover in grants such as Title I within the allowable limits.

Ms. Siegel then addressed the 2018-19 budget. She said we have come through three difficult years, which began with a \$16 million gap in 2016-17.

Ms. Siegel said she provided the committee an updated copy of the budget history. She noted the state has increased the Alliance allocation by about \$1.1 million. Overall, the budget is up in revenue by \$3.8 million.

Ms. Siegel highlighted risk factors in 2018-19, including the change in health insurance to the Connecticut Partnership Plan. She said the certified staff in the BEA and BCAS unions have transitioned. AFSCME is expected to join the Connecticut Partnership effective November 1, while the NAGE outcome is not final. She said as a result anticipated savings in the budget gap plan will be reduced.

Ms. Siegel said another risk factor is federal grants. Appropriation amounts have not been received for 2018-19. She said the ultimate appropriations could be stable, higher or lower in comparison to last year.

Ms. Siegel said the third major risk factor is special

education. She said new classes have been opened and there has been redeployment of existing resources, which is a positive development, however, there is an additional commitment to services such as speech. Out-of-district expenditures are being monitored. She added in 2017-18 special education was 29.5 percent of the total budget, including operating and grants.

Ms. Siegel said higher expenditures will compound fiscal challenges in 2019-20 because a higher commitment of funding will be required to sustain the services. She said a balanced budget is going to be dependent upon attainment of all of the projections that comprise the budget gap plan, including savings from deficit prevention mode and the designated elimination of positions.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said special education expenses going forward were hard to project because the placement of children is in flux at the beginning of the school year; more will be known by the end of the month.

Mr. Taylor said Amazon has been successful because Jeff Bezos always underestimated his quarterly earnings. He asked if Ms. Siegel's estimates were on the higher or lower end. Ms. Siegel said there are always some budget reserves, with erring on the side of caution, but shocks to the system could create an issue.

Mr. Taylor asked if anyone had reached out and advocated to the state's federal delegation for assistance. Dr. Johnson said she met with Congressman Himes and Senator Murphy was recently in the district. She said there would be a joint meeting with the Bridgeport state delegation. She said we're starting earlier than we have in the past with these conversations. Ms. Martinez said she would like to be part of

such a meeting.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the amount of federal grants is determined by the U.S. Congress and allocation formulas. She said federal allocations are usually announced from late August to October.

Ms. Siegel spoke on the internal RFP competition for Priority ESH(extended school hours) grants. She said the Priority ESH grant for 2018-19 is \$361,964, which is about \$1600 higher than the prior year. She said there was prior discussion with the board that we would enter into two-year cycles for the grants.

Ms. Siegel said the first cycle was 2017-18 and 2018-19, making this year the second year of the cycle for the five schools – Bryant, Johnson, Batalla, Read and Claytor – who were successful in the first competition.

Ms. Siegel said Classical Studies, the main building and the annex, are also receiving funds from this grant source.

Ms. Siegel said a webinar would be held with the schools to explain the process for planning their second year.

Ms. Siegel said last year the Classical Studies Annex received \$74,000 from the grant and \$150,000 which went through the district, which was used to pay for a portion of the K-2 teachers because the school was on an extended time model. She said the ESH grant pertains to voluntary services only. The programs at Classical Studies were voluntary for grades K to 2 and mandated for Grades 3 to 6 last year.

Ms. Siegel said in 2018-19 the extended time model has

ended and teachers are not working extended time. She said in order to offer an ESH program going forward the district has to fund teacher time.

In 2018-19, the same dollars Classical Studies had the year before, \$224,000, have been reallocated.

Ms. Siegel said the program at the Annex is similar to the program for last year except it will be four days a week. The program in the main building will be brand new and now includes a partnership with the Carver Foundation.

Ms. Siegel said a district-level committee will review the applications and rate and rank them, and schools will be selected for the second round of grants.

Nadira Clarke, director of grants, said the template used is the same as in the first cycle of the ESH. She said the five schools are keeping their provider, but Carver is new so the contract is being brought to the board. She said the contract was being vetted by the city attorney's office.

Ms. Clarke said it was hoped to start the program on October 15th and it will run through May 10th. She said the Carver Foundation will provide academic, literacy, math, technology, and science enrichment as well as recreational and wellness opportunities. She said the Carver Foundation provided information on their work in Norwalk. She said the \$110,000 district contribution is not enough to cover all the services, so an additional \$100,000 is to be covered by fundraising.

Novelette Peterkin, the executive director of the Carver Foundation, addressed the board and said the nature of the program would not change if fundraising fell short. She said if the board approves this, the program will happen.

Ms. Peterkin said in Norwalk the foundation partners with the principals at ten different schools. In response to a question, she said families in Norwalk are charged \$260 a year so they have skin in the game.

Dr. Johnson said the teachers had signed an MOU to get the extended day program in place at Classical Studies. The MOU expired and the teachers did not want to participate. She said she then met Ms. Peterkin at an event and began the conversation with the foundation to keep the extended day program in place. She said the stars aligned to save the extended day program at Classical Studies.

Helen Giles, principal of Classical Studies, said she was excited about partnering with the Carver Foundation. She said the first part of the program every day will focus on academic and the second part on enrichment.

Mr. Taylor said he just wanted to hear the plan has been vetted by the administrators. He said he was willing to put his name on it, pending legal approval. He said it was truly a blessing.

In response to a question, Assistant Principal Lindsay Davis said teachers can choose to participate in the program. She said there has been a preliminary interest survey and interest has been expressed by teachers. She said students and families have to opt into the program, although she expected that to be a high number based on feedback.

Ms. Siegel said the contract needed to be moved to the full board in order to be ready to implement the program in October.

Mr. Taylor moved *“to approve the contract for the Carver Foundation for Classical Magnet Studies, pending city attorney approval of the contract.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

The next item was on the E-Rate RFP.

Ms. Siegel said Mr. Postolowski could not be here due to illness. She said she was not a member of the committee involved in the selection; Mr. Postolowski was in charge.

Ms. Siegel said the document provided indicates the summary of the ratings by the selection committee, whose names were also listed. There were four applicants to the RFQ.

Ms. Siegel said Kellogg & Sovereign has been the vendor utilized by the district and was rated number one by the committee. She said Kellogg & Sovereign's cost of \$24,950 is about \$10,000 lower than the amount previously charged.

Ms. Sigel said on the basis of the savings and the ratings of the committee we are recommending Kellogg & Sovereign be selected as the vendor and a three-year contract be signed at a fixed rate for each year.

Mr. Taylor moved *“to approve the committee-selected approved vendor to move it to the full board.”* The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

The next item was on legal expenses from July 1, 2018 to July 31, 2018.

Dr. Johnson said she will report legal expenses at each Finance Committee meeting. She said this was a way to be



transparent and keep the board updated.

In response to a question, Ms. Siegel said the July total for Berchem Moses was \$21,739.50. Last year's July bills from Shipman & Goodwin totaled \$38,599.17.

Mr. Taylor said he's not ecstatic about it, but it could be worse.

Dr. Johnson said moving forward she was going to reach out to the city attorney's office to see if they can handle expulsion hearings to eliminate costs in that area.

Dr. Johnson then discussed the previously layoff of the board's five SROs. She said based on the arbitration award they are entitled to come back to their place of employment. She said one officer is working in Naugatuck and one in Stratford. She added they have to be physically fit to return to the job.

Dr. Johnson said the financial exposure is the difference between what the SROs made during the two-year period and what they would have made as an SRO and compensate them accordingly. They have been given until September 30 to provide that information.

Dr. Johnson said we got into this position because of the timing of the layoff notices from the city. She said she has asked Berchem Moses to speak to the city because it was not a board mistake, but a mistake on the city side. She said she believed that because it was a city error the city should compensate them, not the board. She said the SROs were successful in the arbitration based on when the city sent out the notices.

Mr. Taylor said he would like the city to pay the legal bill because they messed up. He said the use of Berchem Moses on this matter would cost the board money. He asked Dr. Johnson to ask the city to absorb all the costs associated with this before calling Berchem Moses. He said he would go to hell and high water before he sees the board spend any money on a city error.

Dr. Johnson said she believed the city attorney's office is going to take the stance of the city. Mr. Taylor said after hearing Atty. Bohannon at board meetings he suggested Dr. Johnson engage him in a diplomatic approach.

Ms. Martinez said she would give support to Dr. Johnson on this matter and asked the committee be kept updated on the matter.

Mr. Taylor moved the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ms. Martinez and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod