

Tuesday, October 22, 2019

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE OF GREAT CITY SCHOOLS/MALES OF COLOR OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held October 22, 2019, at Bridgeport City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 5:52 p.m. Present were Chair Joseph Sokolovic, Dr. Melissa Jenkins, Dr. Carmen McPherson, JoAnn Kennedy, Sauda Baraka, John Ramos(via phone), and Natasha Noel.

Mr. Sokolovic moved to approve the committee's minutes of September 24, 2019. The motion was seconded by Ms. Kennedy and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was discussion on last year's forum, mentorship programs, and the future direction of the committee.

Mr. Sokolovic said the forum was great and suggested planning another one. Dr. Jenkins suggested a forum that highlighted mentoring to make people more aware of it.

Dr. McPherson said the Central mentoring program will begin in November and meet every other week with the same format as last year, from 2:30 to 4:00 after school. She said herself and security officer Lawrence Richardson would present similar material as last year, with a doubling up of the topics that proved popular.

Dr. McPherson said last year there were trips to downtown Bridgeport and Harlem on Saturdays. It is hoped to have three trips this year, depending on funding.

In response to a question, Dr. McPherson said the students in the program were mainly selected last year by teachers.

Ms. Noel said the middle school mentoring began on October 12th. She said the program meets once a month on Saturdays. The first session covered goal-setting with the boys; November' topic will be positive habits. There will be a community service project in December. Future sessions will cover effective communication, skiing and fishing events, developing positive relationships, and defining success. In May there will be a men of color careers fair to expose the boys to men of different backgrounds and occupations.

Ms. Noel said the group is averaging about 30 to 40 boys, but the goal is to serve 150. She added it was hoped to give the boys a book at every meeting. Ms. Kennedy suggested the School Volunteer Association as a source for books. Several options for books were discussed.

Mr. Sokolovic urged the careers event include men in scientific fields. Dr. McPherson said she had looked into the possibility of a trip to the African-American museum in Washington.

Ms. Noel said now that the committee was in the first full year of mentoring that should be a year-end event, which could be the career fair.

Mr. Sokolovic said he discussed with Supt. Testani and Dr. Jenkins the possibility of having suspended middle school

students attend the weekend mentoring rather than miss school time.

Ms. Noel said she did not want the mentoring program to have a punitive vibe. She added that mentoring requires consistent attendance in order for it to have impact. Dr. Jenkins said counselors could suggest this as an alternative to families. She said parents she spoke to viewed the mentoring as a support.

Ms. Baraka said the code of conduct is not being used equitably by administrators. She said the use of mentoring for suspensions should be codified as part of the restorative practices.

Mr. Ramos said offering a program like this might pull kids to the positive side. Dr. Jenkins said the state is moving towards the terminology of a multi-tiered system of support.

Dr. McPherson said the parents at the end-of-year celebration at Central High praised mentoring for providing support to their children.

Ms. Baraka said the committee's white paper needed to have an action plan. She suggested the mentoring option for suspensions could be part of the plan.

Mr. Ramos reported on the mentorship program at Harding. Meetings are currently held at 3:00 p.m. Thursdays for about 70 total students in two groups. He said all the students are associated with athletics. The mentors come from Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity.

Mr. Sokolovic said he spoke to the superintendent about expanding Harding's mentoring beyond the sports teams.

Mr. Ramos said the good thing about the athletic participation is the level of commitment by the students is very high. He said there were other students interested in the program and he could expand it beyond athletics.

Mr. Ramos said a program he did on college access last winter included plenty of students not connected with athletics. He said the only limitation was the amount of time he has. Ms. Baraka suggested that another mentor be hired for an additional group at Harding. Mr. Ramos said he believed he could pull together 25 more students to participate.

Mr. Sokolovic said last year was the first year there was money for the programs. He suggested this year the focus be on expanding the programs.

The next agenda item was on the Males of Color programming budget.

Dr. Jenkins said she understood the budget that was available last year would be the starting point this year. Mr. Sokolovic said he did not know if Mr. Testani knew the extent of all the programming. He said he sent Mr. Testani last year's budget to make it clear there are four distinct programs funded at \$5,000 each.

Mr. Sokolovic said the committee was receiving ten percent discounts on food purchases from minority businesses, but Mr. Testani suggested reaching out to area businesses for donations or larger discounts, which would leave more money for programming.

Ms. Baraka said the businesses the committee had used were not able to offer the level of discounts as large as big

businesses. She said she viewed the food purchases as building capacity in the community. She said she believed the program would be open to donations, but the committee would have to think about what to do regarding expenditures.

Ms. Kennedy and Ms. Baraka said if someone is helping students of color they have to show support for the community.

Ms. Baraka said civil rights goes beyond education.

There was a discussion about the timing of the next meeting. November 26th was agreed to.

The next agenda item was on the white paper.

There was a discussion of the paragraphs assigned to the various committee members.

It was suggested to combine the various legal cases, including *Plessey v. Ferguson*, into one contribution.

Ms. Baraka suggested the paragraphs be related to the work of the committee

There was a discussion about the Spanish-speaking community. Ms. Baraka noted sometimes families were afraid to fill out the committee's surveys.

Dr. Jenkins said data is showing that the Latin community will be the majority in public schools. She said after the white paper is completed the question had to be asked if Latin males view themselves as males of color.

Mr. Ramos said in his experience the students from families that have been here for sometime view themselves more as males of color than the newer families in the community.

Mr. Ramos said mentors who speak Spanish are needed to make those students feel comfortable.

Mr. Sokolovic said this is something that could be addressed with the national body of Great City Schools. He noted there was a bigger disparity in high-paying STEM jobs for Hispanics than for African-Americans.

Ms. Baraka suggested talking about the impact of testing on students whose first language is not English in the white paper. Dr. Jenkins said the state accountability index includes greater credit for growing students who are second-language learners, special education or free and reduced meals. She said statewide 52 percent of public school students are considered minority. Ms. Baraka suggested adding a reference to this in the white paper.

There was a discussion of disciplinary data that was provided to the committee. Ms. Baraka said she had an issue with what is going on in the IT School.

Dr. Jenkins discussed the difficulties of supervising hallways at Harding due to the way the building was constructed.

It was noted at Harding there were 61 of African-Americans and 50 Latinos who had received out-of-school suspensions so far this year. Ms. Baraka noted the unique numbers were 45 and 43 students. Dr. McPherson noted there was a big incident at Harding that could have contributed to the numbers.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

*Approved by the committee on November 29, 2019*